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Promotion and protection of the rights of children

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Children and armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report, which covers the period from January to December 2016, is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2225 (2015). It highlights trends regarding the impact of armed conflict on children and provides information on violations committed in 2016, as well as related protection concerns. Where possible, violations are attributed to parties to conflict and, in line with the resolutions of the Council, the annexes to the report include a list of parties that, in violation of international law, engage in the recruitment and use of children, the killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, attacks on schools and or hospitals and attacks or threats of attacks against protected personnel,[1] and the abduction of children.

2. All the information provided in the report has been vetted for accuracy by the United Nations. In situations where the ability to obtain or verify information was hampered by factors such as insecurity or access restrictions, it is qualified as such. In this regard, the information contained in the report is only indicative and does not always represent the full scale of incidents committed in 2016. In addition, some incidents, in particular instances of recruitment and use of children, abduction of children and sexual violence against children, were verified in 2016 but may have commenced earlier.

3. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) and in identifying situations that fall within the scope of the mandate, my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict has adopted a pragmatic approach aimed at ensuring broad and effective protection for children. Accordingly, the present report documents situations in which apparent violations of international norms and

* A/72/150.

[1] In accordance with Security Council resolutions, "protected personnel" are considered to be teachers, doctors, other educational personnel, students and patients.

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standards for the protection of children affected by conflict are considered to be of such gravity as to warrant international concern. In characterizing the facts described below as grave violations, it is the aim of my Special Representative to bring these situations to the attention of national Governments, which bear the primary responsibility in providing effective protection and relief to all affected children, and to encourage them to take remedial measures. However, reference to a situation is not a legal determination and reference to a non-State actor does not affect its legal status.

4. The preparation of the report involved broad consultations within the United Nations, at Headquarters and in the field. The preparation of the present also reflects a new approach of enhanced engagement with Member States. Over the past six months, consultations with parties to conflict noted in the report focused on gaining a greater commitment to prevent violations against children. Where significant progress was achieved or ongoing conduct gave rise to concern, this is highlighted in country-specific sections.

II. Addressing the impact of armed conflict on children

A. Overview of the situation of children and armed conflict

5. While in some country situations the impact of armed conflict on children was low in 2016 and few violations were documented, in other country situations incidents affecting children continued at high levels. In 2016, there were at least 4,000 verified violations by government forces and more than 11,500 verified violations by the range of non-State armed groups.

6. The recruitment and use of children documented in Somalia and the Syrian Arab Republic more than doubled compared with 2015. In South Sudan, 1,022 children were recruited and used. Children continued to be exposed to an unacceptable risk of killing and maiming in a number of country situations. In Afghanistan, the United Nations verified 3,512 child casualties, the highest number ever recorded. In Yemen, the United Nations verified 1,340 child casualties. The cross-border activities of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), coupled with responses to that group, also led to significant child casualties, with over 2,000 children documented as killed or maimed in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. The number of child casualties in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was also the highest recorded since 2012.

7. In the Lake Chad basin, Boko Haram activities continued to expand from Nigeria into neighbouring countries and attacks against civilians were perpetrated across the region. Sexual violence against girls was prevalent in Nigeria, as well as in other country situations, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan, Somalia, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

B. Concerns regarding the increasing disrespect for international law and its impact on children

8. The ever-changing and complex nature of certain conflicts, as well as continually shifting allegiances, posed challenges for the protection of children in situations of armed conflict. In addition, the troubling trends presented above are a clear manifestation of the use of abhorrent tactics of warfare by a number of parties to conflict.

9. Asymmetric attacks by non-State armed groups had a severe impact on children in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as in Nigeria and neighbouring countries, including forcing children to be suicide bombers. The number of violations committed by Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, ISIL and the Taliban totalled more than 6,800. Responses to the actions of these groups led to high levels of child casualties, largely owing to their cross-border nature and presence in densely populated areas.

10. The denial of humanitarian access to children was also a troubling trend in certain contexts. Children were trapped in besieged areas or deprived of access to food, water and medical assistance, including vaccines. This is a deeply troubling issue that compounds the direct impact of hostilities and has devastating consequences for children, particularly in their formative stages.

11. The increasing number of non-State armed groups that were used to fight on behalf of Governments as well as ongoing air strikes by multiple entities, including international coalitions, were once again a particular concern. While these actors are bound by applicable obligations under international law, their composition, structure or cross-border nature can hamper the implementation of important safeguards, such as applying precautionary measures, and reduces the clarity of command structures, resulting in violations against children. I urge Member States, acting alone or as part of a coalition, to increase efforts to prevent such violations.

12. Given the number of incidents of killing and maiming of children documented in the present report, I also call for a renewed focus to ensure respect for the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution under international humanitarian law. Specifically, when making operational decisions, armed forces need to take into account that, in situations where armed groups hold territory, a significant number of children may be in close proximity to military positions or may even be used as human shields.

13. Enhanced implementation of these essential principles will also help to prevent the destruction of vital civilian infrastructure. In 2016, in nearly all the countries mentioned in the present report, schools and hospitals were subjected to air strikes as well as ground operations. I urge parties to conflict to be cognizant of the long-term impact of conducting hostilities in heavily populated or residential areas, such as the persistence of explosive remnants of war.

14. The "security screening" of civilians in areas formerly held by non-State armed groups, undertaken by government security forces or pro-government militias, has been an emerging concern related to the deprivation of liberty of children. While it is the responsibility of Governments to ensure the safety of civilians, authorities in conflict-affected areas are urged to use civilian child protection actors to carry out such screening, and to adhere to the principles of last resort and shortest possible time for deprivation of liberty of children, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. I also encourage the adoption of protocols for the handover of children associated with, or in areas formerly held by, armed groups to civilian child protection actors.

15. Regarding displacement, disregard for the fundamental principles of international law is a significant incentive for civilians to flee. The unprecedented number of refugee children and internally displaced children is not the result of conflict alone but of the brutality with which parties conduct hostilities, including by directly targeting children. Increased efforts must be made by the international community to enhance the protection of civilians and respect for international humanitarian law, including through ending impunity. These efforts also need to be coupled with conflict resolution and prevention initiatives.

C. Positive developments regarding engagement with parties to conflict

16. Notwithstanding the challenges to ending violations, there has been clear progress to protect children through dialogue and efforts to achieve conflict resolution and prevention. The United Nations has continued to utilize the "Children, not soldiers" campaign and to leverage peace processes to engage with a wide range of parties in order to gain commitments to protect children.

17. In this regard, the Security Council continues to have a crucial role to play to facilitate and encourage dialogue on child protection. When these efforts are fruitful and political space is opened, the protection needs of children can be addressed in negotiations and mainstreamed in peace agreements. The importance of this work has been demonstrated during the reporting period, with the continued direct engagement of the United Nations in support of the talks between the Government of Colombia and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP). This important development builds on previous interactions, which have proved that engagement on issues such as the separation, release and handover of children can provide an entry point for difficult or protracted negotiations.

18. Other engagements by the United Nations with non-State armed groups resulted in the signing of two new action plans in Mali and the Sudan, while in the Central African Republic 3,897 children were separated from armed groups and in the Philippines more than 1,850 children were separated from the military wing of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

19. Moving forward, the progress achieved through the "Children, not soldiers" campaign to strengthen national capacity has helped to lay the foundations in a number of countries for strengthened engagement with non-State armed groups. I urge concerned Member States to support engagement with non-State actors on child protection and note that these initiatives can strongly contribute to peacemaking and conflict prevention efforts.

III. Information on violations committed against children during armed conflict and progress made by parties on dialogue, action plans and other measures to halt and prevent violations against children

A. Situations on the agenda of the Security Council

Afghanistan

20. The security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated in 2016, with intensifying armed clashes between the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and the Taliban affecting children throughout the country. The United Nations verified 3,512 child casualties, the highest number ever recorded in the country and an increase of 24 per cent compared with 2015; almost 1 in 3 civilian casualties was a child casualty.

Grave violations

21. The United Nations verified 96 cases of child recruitment and use of children, double the number of cases verified in 2015. Armed groups remained the main perpetrators of recruitment and use of children, with 84 verified cases, of which 69 (including 1 girl) were attributed to the Taliban (a threefold increase compared with

2015); 10 to ISIL-Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP), while 5 could not be attributed to a specific group. In addition, there were unverified reports of recruitment affecting more than 3,000 children, mostly by armed groups including Taliban and ISIL-KP.

22. A total of 11 verified cases of recruitment and use of children were attributed to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, of which 7 were perpetrated by the Afghan National Police; 2 by the Afghan Local Police; 1 by the Afghan National Police and Afghan Local Police at a joint checkpoint; and 1 by the Afghan National Army, while 1 verified case was attributed to pro-government militias. In addition to being used as checkpoint guards or as bodyguards, 3 of the boys were reportedly also sexually abused and exploited for the purposes of *bacha bazi*.

23. As at December, the Government reported that 167 boys were held in juvenile rehabilitation centres on national security-related charges, including for association with armed groups. The United Nations remains concerned about the detention of these children in adult detention centres, particularly the large increase in children detained in the maximum security detention facility in Parwan, where 133 juveniles were held in December compared with 53 juveniles held in January.

24. The United Nations verified 3,512 child casualties in Afghanistan in 2016 (923 killed and 2,589 injured). Ground engagements and explosive remnants of war were the leading causes.

25. Of these, 273 children were killed and 674 injured by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, 12 were killed and 41 injured by the pro-government militias and 3 were injured in joint operations of Afghan National Defence and Security Forces/pro-government militias. In addition, 87 casualties were attributed to international military forces, 19 were attributed to joint operations involving Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, pro-government militias or international military forces and 19 were attributed to undetermined armed forces. Trends of concern include a doubling of child casualties (200) resulting from air strikes and a 33 per cent increase of child casualties attributed to pro-government militias. In addition, 10 child casualties resulted from cross-border shelling from Pakistan.

26. Armed groups perpetrated 1,447 child casualties, including 1,093 attributed to the Taliban, 100 attributed to ISIL-KP, 4 attributed to Hizb-i Islami, 1 attributed to the Haqqani Network, 7 attributed to two or more groups and 242 to undetermined armed groups.

27. The United Nations verified 7 cases of sexual violence: 5 incidents were attributed to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and 2 to the Taliban. These incidents included children being raped at Afghan National Police and Afghan Local Police checkpoints as well as the abduction and forced marriage of a nine-year-old girl by the Taliban. As at early 2017, the United Nations had not received any information regarding actions taken against the perpetrators.

28. Verified attacks on schools and education personnel decreased to 77 incidents, compared with 132 in 2015. Intensive fighting between the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and the Taliban led to schools being hit in crossfire. Of the verified incidents, 51 were attributed to the Taliban, 7 to ISIL-KP and 12 to undetermined armed groups; 23 incidents directly targeted girls' education; 4 incidents were attributed to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (3 to the Afghan National Army, 1 undetermined); and 1 incident was jointly attributed to the Afghan National Army and the Taliban.

29. The United Nations verified 118 incidents of attacks on health facilities and personnel, of which 106 were attributed to armed groups, including 84 to the Taliban, 1 to Hizb-i-Islami and 1 to ISIL-KP. The targeting of, and threats against,

polio workers by armed groups remained a particular concern.[2] In addition, 9 incidents were attributed to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, 1 was attributed to pro-government militias and 1 was jointly attributed to the Afghan National Army and international military forces.

30. The United Nations also documented the military use of 34 schools and 13 health facilities by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. In addition, 1 school was used by pro-government militias. Armed groups were responsible for the military use of 7 schools and 10 health facilities. In a positive development, in 2016 the Ministry of Education promulgated two directives instructing the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces to stop using schools for military purposes.

31. The United Nations verified 10 incidents of abduction affecting 20 boys and 1 girl. A total of 13 children were abducted by armed groups (11 by the Taliban and 2 by ISIL-KP), including on account of their perceived affiliation with the Government; 1 verified incident was attributed to the Afghan National Army and 1 to the Afghan Local Police, affecting 8 children; and in September, the Afghan National Army took 7 boys from a school to pressure the Taliban to release a soldier.

32. Of 155 reported incidents of denial of humanitarian access, 98 were verified, including 46 incidents of threats and 10 incidents of attacks against humanitarian workers. Armed groups perpetrated 94 incidents, including the abduction of humanitarian workers; 2 incidents were also attributed to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces.

Developments and concerns

33. I commend the Government for the significant progress made in implementing its action plan to end and prevent child recruitment and use of children by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, notably through the establishment of child protection units in Afghan National Police recruitment centres and the issuance of ministerial directives, including the decision of the National Directorate for Security prohibiting the transfer of children to the detention facility in Parwan.

34. Notwithstanding this progress, I am concerned that children continue to be detained in the detention facility in Parwan, and I call upon the Government to transfer them to juvenile rehabilitation centres in accordance with national directives and in line with international obligations under international law and international standards. Moreover, while important advances to strengthen age assessment processes in Afghan National Police recruitment centres were realized, the lack of corresponding procedures for Afghan Local Police recruitment, as well as the continued reliance on pro-government militias for which no recruitment oversight mechanisms are evident, remain cause for concern.

35. Lastly, regarding killing and maiming, I am deeply concerned about the increase of child casualties and urge the Government and other parties to conflict to take urgent action to better protect children.

Central African Republic

36. Notwithstanding a relatively stable election process in early 2016, intercommunal violence and conflict persisted across the country. The Union pour la paix en Centrafrique (UPC) extended its presence eastwards and opposed the

[2] According to information provided by the World Health Organization, Afghanistan is one of three remaining polio-endemic countries in the world.

ex-Séléka coalition reunification attempt by the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC).

37. Documented violations affecting children decreased by half compared with 2015, notwithstanding an increase in cases of recruitment and use of children. Incidents of violations also grew at the end of 2016 as a result of clashes between ex-Séléka and anti-balaka elements in Kaga Bandoro, as well as among ex-Séléka elements in Ouaka and Haute-Kotto Prefectures.

Grave violations

38. The number of children recruited and used increased by almost 50 per cent, with 50 boys and 24 girls affected, including some children as young as nine. Cases were attributed to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) (56), FPRC (9), anti-balaka elements (4), UPC (4) and the Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique (MPC) (1).

39. A total of 66 children, including 27 girls, were killed (34) or maimed (32), the youngest being two months old. Child casualties resulted from targeted and stray bullets, stabbing and explosive remnants of war. FPRC, MPC and their coalition were responsible for the killing of 10 and maiming of 13 children; 9 casualties were attributed to anti-balaka elements, 7 each were attributed to UPC and the Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation group, 5 were attributed to armed Fulani elements and 2 were attributed to LRA.

40. The United Nations verified that 55 girls were victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence. Most incidents occurred in the Bangui PK5 neighbourhood, Ouaka prefecture and other areas controlled by armed groups. Perpetrators included anti-balaka elements (13), FPRC (6), MPC (6), PK5 self-defence group in Bangui (5), undetermined ex-Séléka elements (5), LRA (4), the Révolution et justice group (4) and UPC (3). There were also 2 incidents of sexual violence committed by government elements and 1 incident of attempted rape and 2 incidents of rapes committed by the Uganda People's Defence Force.

41. The United Nations verified 8 attacks on schools and protected personnel by LRA, MPC, RPRC, the FPRC/MPC coalition and anti-balaka elements. In October, 3 schoolteachers were killed by elements of the FPRC/MPC coalition who invaded a school in Kaga Bandoro and 1 teacher was stabbed by ex-Séléka elements in Bamou.

42. A total of 22 schools were used by armed groups, who claimed that the facilities were disused. In September, the United Nations issued press releases condemning the practice and, subsequently, MPC and FDPC vacated 6 schools, while 3 other schools were vacated by UPC and FRPC but were later reused. United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) troops used 2 schools in late 2016 and early 2017. Once informed, MINUSCA vacated the schools in accordance with its 2015 directive on the protection of schools and universities.

43. A total of 16 attacks against hospitals and medical personnel were verified, including by anti-balaka elements, LRA, FPRC, UPC, RPRC and the FPRC/MPC coalition. For example, on 12 October, anti-balaka elements invaded a health centre at a site for internally displaced persons in Kaga Bandoro, killed 1 mother and 1 baby and looted medical supplies.

44. The number of verified incidents of abduction almost doubled compared with 2015, with 38 incidents affecting 66 boys and 32 girls. LRA was responsible for the abduction of 84 children, while 43 children escaped from LRA during 2016, some of whom had been held in captivity since 2011. Following United Nations advocacy, anti-balaka elements released 4 Fulani children abducted in 2013.

45. Denial of humanitarian access remained a concern, with 72 verified incidents of killing, looting and threats against humanitarian workers. The majority of cases were attributed to anti-balaka elements, FPRC and other unidentified ex-Séléka elements. Moreover, LRA seemed to target non-governmental organizations for communication equipment. The national police and gendarmerie also arbitrarily arrested 5 humanitarian workers.

Developments and concerns

46. I urge MPC and FPRC to expeditiously fulfil their pledges to end and prevent grave violations, identify associated children and negotiate action plans. In this regard, I am encouraged that dialogue with anti-balaka local commanders, the Groupe des patriotes, the Révolution et justice group, RPRC and FPRC resulted in the handover of children.

47. A total of 2,691 boys and 1,206 girls, some as young as eight, were separated from armed groups (70 per cent from anti-balaka elements). The community-based nature of some groups represented a risk of re-recruitment for children and tailored programmes sponsored by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) were put in place. However, lack of funding and the resumption of violence impeded reintegration efforts.

48. Breaking the cycle of impunity in the Central African Republic must be prioritized and I call on all parties and partners to support accountability efforts, including the work of the Special Criminal Court, as well as through the framework of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation led by the African Union.

49. Sexual exploitation and abuse of children by peacekeepers, whether under the command of the United Nations or other international arrangements, continued to be a serious protection concern in the Central African Republic (for more information, see A/71/818).

Colombia

50. The year 2016 was marked by the signing of a final peace agreement between the Government and FARC-EP and preparations for dialogue with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN). Armed violence between the Colombian military and FARC-EP reached its lowest level in 50 years. Since FARC-EP committed itself to ending child recruitment in the context of the peace talks, the overall number of recruitment cases has dropped, although cases by ELN and dissident fronts of FARC-EP were reported towards the end of the year. According to data provided by the Government's Victim Assistance and Comprehensive Reparation Unit, displacement decreased compared with 2015 and affected approximately 70,000 victims, more than 45 per cent of whom were children. Despite a decline in conflict intensity and the withdrawal of FARC-EP, the presence of non-State armed groups, such as ELN and post-demobilization groups, as well as FARC-EP dissident fronts, continued to pose child protection challenges.

Grave violations

51. The recruitment and use of 151 boys and 79 girls was verified. Most of these children were recruited before 2016. The majority had been associated with FARC-EP (105) and ELN (102). For example, in February, a 16-year-old boy was handed over to humanitarian workers in Arauca, 11 months after his recruitment by FARC-EP. In October in Cauca, the Colombian military handed over to the Colombian Family Welfare Institute a pregnant girl of seventeen who had escaped from ELN. Other cases were attributed to post-demobilization groups (11) and the Ejército Popular de Liberación (3).

52. The United Nations verified the killing of 6 children and maiming of 2 children by landmines and unexploded ordnances, a sharp decrease following the 2015 demining agreement between the Government and FARC-EP. There were also developments regarding the accountability of Colombian military members who had killed children in the context of the armed conflict.

53. The number of verified cases of sexual violence remained low, with 3 girls affected. The peace agreement indicated that sexual violence-related crimes would not be subject to amnesty. Progress was made in fighting impunity, with a member of the Colombian military sentenced to 14 years of imprisonment in January for raping a 14 year-old girl in Cundinamarca in 2012.

54. The United Nations verified 6 attacks on schools and 3 cases of military use. Damage to schools occurred during crossfire between the Colombian military and ELN and as a result of landmines planted by unknown perpetrators. A school in Arauca was also damaged in an aerial bombing by the Colombian military in September. Allegations of teachers being threatened by armed groups, such as ELN and the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, were also received.

Developments and concerns

55. The final peace agreement between the Government and FARC-EP included an important provision on the best interests of the child and the primacy of children's rights in all areas of implementation. Moreover, the amnesty law approved by Congress in December included a special provision on children, requiring the State not to prosecute those who were under eighteen when they committed acts in the context of armed conflict.

56. I strongly commend the Government of Colombia and the FARC-EP leadership for the signature of the peace agreement. I note that successful implementation requires dedicated resources, sustained political will and effective coordination to address remaining challenges. In particular, I encourage the strengthening of institutional capacity at the local level and expansion of community-level prevention programmes to address the root causes of recruitment and use of children. I also call upon subregional organizations to support these processes.

57. In related developments, a Constitutional Court decision in February confirmed that all children recruited by armed groups, including post-demobilization groups, were victims and as such were entitled to reparations and reintegration support under the law on victims' rights and land restitution.

58. As reflected in my country report on the situation of children in Colombia (S/2016/837), one key achievement was the May agreement between the Government and FARC-EP on the separation of children. In September, 13 children were released by FARC-EP. In addition, presidential decree 1753 was issued in November to ensure that armed groups prepare a list of children for separation. Parties also agreed on the development of a special programme for the restoration of rights, reintegration and reparations for all separated children under eighteen. However, the operational modalities of the special programme remained to be defined as at early 2017.

59. As stipulated in the peace agreement and at the request of the Government, a United Nations political mission of observers was deployed to monitor and verify the bilateral ceasefire and laying down of arms, as part of a tripartite monitoring and verification mechanism. As FARC-EP are laying down arms, I urge parties to continue to identify recruited children, prevent informal demobilization and ensure an adequate child protection response to prevent retaliation or re-recruitment by

other groups, as well as to provide health and education services to the most vulnerable communities.

60. I am concerned at the increasing numbers of cases of the recruitment and use of children attributed to armed groups, in particular ELN, and I call on them to take immediate steps to end this practice. Furthermore, I call upon the negotiating parties to take the issue of child recruitment fully into consideration in the ongoing peace talks between the Government and ELN.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

61. The security situation in the east of the country remained volatile and was marked by military operations by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) against armed groups. The situation deteriorated in North Kivu, with the appearance of new armed groups, as well as violence between the Hutu and Nande communities. There were also clashes among Twa and Luba communities in Tanganyika and between security forces and the Kamuina Nsapu militia in the Kasai provinces. While information regarding violations committed in the Kasai provinces was pending verification in early 2017, the magnitude and nature of allegations received was alarming.

62. A total of 2,334 grave violations were verified. The number of child casualties increased by 75 per cent compared with 2015 and was the highest since 2012.

Grave violations

63. The United Nations verified the new recruitment and use of 492 children (including 63 girls) by armed groups, 82 per cent of which occurred in North Kivu; 129 of those children were under fifteen at the time of recruitment. The main perpetrators were the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) (141), Nyatura (122), the Mai-Mai Mazembe (44) and the Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri (FRPI) (40). Almost one third of the children were also victims of other violations during their association. Verification of the number of children recruited and used by militias of the Twa and Luba communities and by the Kamuina Nsapu militia was ongoing as at early 2017. In addition, 28 boys were identified among the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition elements extracted by the United Nations from the Garamba National Park in September.

64. In 2016, FARDC handed over to the United Nations 193 children allegedly associated with armed groups, including from Angenga prison, Mongala province, some of whom had been detained by national authorities for up to one year. As at early 2017, 21 boys were still detained by FARDC, including 3 for more than six months.

65. At least 124 children were killed and 116 maimed, including 41 due to crossfire and 34 due to unexploded ordnances. Mai-Mai Mazembe (49), FDLR (23) and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) (19) were the main perpetrators. Furthermore, 110 children were allegedly killed and maimed by machete during the Twa-Luba violence in Tanganyika Province, while 20 child casualties were attributed to FARDC and 4 to the Congolese National Police. In December, the outbreak of violence in the Kasai region resulted in the maiming of at least 4 boys by FARDC and in the alleged killing of 1 baby boy by the Kamuina Nsapu militia. More allegations were being verified as at early 2017.

66. The rape of 170 girls and 1 boy was verified, with 87 violations taking place in North Kivu and 50 in Ituri. The main perpetrators among armed groups were FRPI (42), FDLR (14) and Nyatura (10). FARDC was responsible for 64 cases,

including 1 boy in detention, the Congolese National Police for 12 cases and the Agence nationale de renseignement for 1 case.

67. A total of 68 attacks on schools (51) and hospitals (17) were verified, a significant increase compared with 2015. Perpetrators included Twa militia (13), ADF (8), Mai-Mai Simba (4), Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki (4) and FRPI (3). In Butembo in October, an FARDC rocket hit a school and killed 2 girls and 2 teachers and injured 4 children. In addition, 51 schools and a health centre were allegedly damaged by militias from the Twa and Luba communities. The verification of allegations of a high number of attacks on schools in the Kasai region by the Kamuina Nsapu militia and FARDC was ongoing as at early 2017.

68. A total of 19 schools and 2 hospitals were used for up to several weeks by FARDC (14), the Congolese National Police (1) and armed groups (6) in North Kivu, Tanganyika and South Kivu.

69. A total of 137 boys and 56 girls were abducted, mostly by FDLR (29), FRPI (26), LRA (25), ADF (23) and Nyatura (13), while 4 abductions, including 3 for sexual purposes, were attributed to FARDC. At least 114 children were abducted for recruitment purposes.

70. In terms of denial of humanitarian access, 2 threats against humanitarian workers by Nduma Défense du Congo-Rénové and the Agence nationale de renseignement were verified. In addition, in North and South Kivu, at least 4 humanitarian workers lost their lives and 33 were kidnapped.

Developments and concerns

71. I commend the Government's continued and strong commitment to the action plan. While efforts need to be sustained to end and prevent sexual violence by FARDC and to ensure accountability for perpetrators of grave violations, I welcome the significant steps taken to fulfil the provisions of the action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children. This includes the establishment of an additional joint technical working group, the validation of standard operating procedures for age verification, the adoption of a Ministry of Defence directive for the dissemination of those standard operating procedures within FARDC and the screening of new recruits. I am encouraged that, for the second year in a row, no new case of child recruitment and use by FARDC was documented. In terms of accountability, the United Nations documented the arrest of at least 15 FARDC and 5 Congolese National Police officers, including for child recruitment and use of children offences before 2016, while 41 individuals (23 FARDC, 11 Congolese National Police, 1 Mouvement du 23 mars and 6 Nyatura) received sentences ranging from three years of imprisonment to the death penalty for sexual violence against children. The Government indicated that perpetrators of sexual violence against children were sentenced in 129 instances.

72. In July, the Government also endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration. Lastly, the Government provided multisectoral assistance to child victims of recruitment and use and child survivors of sexual violence.

73. Despite these advances, I am concerned by the reported levels of killing and maiming of children attributed to FARDC, particularly in the Kasai region where there were allegations of the disproportionate use of force, and I urge the Government to take immediate action to prevent child casualties and ensure accountability for any criminal acts, in accordance with its obligations under international law.

74. The United Nations provided technical support and screened more than 7,512 members of FARDC, the Congolese National Police, the Direction générale

de migration and the Agence nationale de renseignement, and separated 191 children in recruitment centres during the screening of new recruits. Awareness-raising by the United Nations and military pressure also contributed to the separation of 1,662 children from armed groups (177 girls), including from FDLR (585), Nyatura (354), FRPI (115) and Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki (93). In 2016, the Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain signed a deed of commitment to protect children in collaboration with the non-governmental organization Geneva Call. However, the Alliance had not signed an action plan with the United Nations as at early 2017.

Iraq

75. Conflict intensified throughout 2016, particularly in Anbar and Ninewa Governorates, with large-scale operations to retake territory from ISIL in Fallujah and Mosul. In addition, suicide and other asymmetric attacks by armed groups had a significant impact on children.

Grave violations

76. At least 168 boys were reportedly recruited and used by parties to the conflict, including ISIL, the People's Defence Forces of the Kurdish Workers Party and the popular mobilization forces. The United Nations verified 114 cases: 40 verified cases were attributed to ISIL in Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk and Ningwa, with 28 boys recruited as fighters, 11 as suicide bombers and 1 as a spy. Children were also allegedly used as human shields by ISIL. A total of 57 children were recruited and used by groups operating under the umbrella of the popular mobilization forces, most of whom received military training and were deployed for combat, while 12 children were recruited by tribal mobilization groups, including from internally displaced persons camps. Five boys were also recruited by the People's Defence Forces

77. As at December, at least 463 children, including 172 in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, remained in detention on national security-related charges, including association with armed groups. There have been allegations of detention and ill-treatment of children by security forces during the screening of civilians from areas formerly held by ISIL and the Government of Iraq requested United Nations assistance to undertake training to prevent abuse of children during screening.

78. The killing and maiming of children remained the most prevalent grave violation. The United Nations recorded 257 incidents, resulting in 834 child casualties of which 138 were verified, resulting in the killing of 229 children (145 boys, 58 girls, 26 sex unknown) and injuries to 181 children (129 boys, 44 girls, 8 sex unknown). ISIL was responsible for at least 13 incidents of targeted attacks against children, including torture. A total of 66 verified incidents resulted from the use of improvised explosive devices, particularly by ISIL, while public areas, security forces and Shia ceremonies were also targeted: 32 incidents of killing and maiming of children were attributed to Iraqi security forces and the international counter-ISIL coalition (30), the Peshmerga (1) and the popular mobilization forces (1), resulting from mortars and rocket attacks, air strikes and artillery shelling. As at early 2017, the Government was working with the United Nations Mine Action Service to remove mines from areas previously under the control of ISIL.

79. One incident of sexual violence was verified, involving a 17-year-old boy who was raped by a member of an unidentified armed group. While concerns of widespread sexual violence perpetrated by ISIL persisted, the violation remained underreported.

80. A total of 10 attacks on schools and education personnel were verified: 2 schools were damaged by air strikes in Mosul, 1 of which was used by ISIL; 3 other schools were damaged during fighting in Kirkuk and Ningwa; 4 teachers were abducted, killed or injured; and teachers were threatened by ISIL in at least 1 other incident. Attacks on 8 health facilities and personnel were verified: 2 hospitals were damaged by air strikes in Ningwa; 3 by were damaged by mortars in Anbar; and medical personnel were targeted in 3 incidents in Diyala and Salah al-Din. Of the 18 verified attacks on education and health facilities and personnel, 8 were attributed to ISIL, 3 to air strikes by Iraqi or international forces and 1 to the popular mobilization forces, while 6 could not be attributed. A further 18 attacks were recorded but could not be verified.

81. The United Nations documented 41 incidents of the military use of schools and hospitals: 34 schools were used by ISIL as military positions, depots and training facilities in Anbar, Kirkuk and Ningwa; 3 schools were used by Iraqi security forces as screening centres in Ningwa; 1 school was used by the popular mobilization forces in Ningwa; and 2 hospitals were reportedly used by ISIL as military positions.

82. The United Nations verified 8 incidents of abduction involving 9 boys and 3 girls: 7 cases were attributed to ISIL (6 boys in Ningwa and 1 girl in Salah al-Din), while the perpetrators of the remaining cases in Diyala, Kerbala and Salah al-Din could not be confirmed. A further 7 incidents of abduction involving 26 children were reported but could not be verified. Moreover, as at 31 December, it is believed that approximately 1,700 women and children remained ISIL captives.

83. A total of 3 incidents of denial of humanitarian access to children were verified: in 1 case in Ningwa, a boy died when ISIL denied him access to critical medical assistance. In addition, it was reported that screening processes for civilians leaving areas formerly held by ISIL in Ningwa and Salah al-Din were used to deny access of children to assistance.

Developments and concerns

84. The continued level of violations by ISIL was gravely disturbing. I am also gravely concerned by the recruitment and use of children by pro-government forces. In this regard, the United Nations raised concerns with the Government and the Kurdistan region of Iraq authorities regarding the recruitment and use of children by the popular mobilization forces. Given that these forces formally came under the purview of the Government at the end of 2016, I urge the authorities to ensure that recruitment is in line with Law No. 3/2010, article 30 (2), to establish appropriate age verification mechanisms and separate any children currently in the ranks, and to pursue accountability for the recruitment and use of children and other violations against children.

Israel and State of Palestine

85. The first half of 2016 was marked by continued levels of violence in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, with clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces and a number of attacks against Israelis. Children in Israel and the State of Palestine continued to be affected by violence, security responses and the prevailing situation of military occupation and closure.

Grave violations

86. The United Nations did not receive reports of the recruitment and use of children in 2016; however, this violation is difficult to document, particularly in Gaza.

87. An increasing number of children from the West Bank were detained by Israeli forces for alleged security violations. Monthly figures provided by the Israel Prison Service indicated that the numbers of Palestinian children in military detention reached the highest levels recorded since 2010, with 444 children (including 15 girls) detained as at the end of March, although this number had decreased to 271 as at September. In East Jerusalem, the United Nations documented 712 cases of Palestinian children detained for security-related offences, including 15 children under twelve, which is the age of criminal responsibility. Following the resumption of the administrative detention of Palestinian children by Israeli authorities in 2015, 10 cases were documented in 2016. The United Nations also documented a total of 185 incidents of ill-treatment of children (175 boys, 10 girls) by Israeli forces during arrests and detention.

88. A total of 36 children (35 Palestinian boys, 1 Israeli girl) were killed and 900 children (887 Palestinian, 13 Israeli) were injured, predominantly in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

89. In the West Bank, 31 Palestinian boys were killed and all but 1 of the killings were attributed to Israeli forces: 15 children were killed while allegedly perpetrating stabbing attacks, 3 while carrying out stabbing attacks, 11 during military and search operations and 1 during demonstrations. Frequent use of live ammunition was documented, killing 30 Palestinian children. A number of cases raise concerns about excessive use of force. For example, on 20 September, an eyewitness stated that Israeli forces continued shooting at a sixteen-year-old boy in Bani Na'im after he had fallen to the ground following initial gunshots to his legs.

90. A total of 857 Palestinian children (797 boys, 60 girls) were injured in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem: 465 children were injured by Israeli forces during arrest operations or demonstrations, 356 during clashes and 4 in response to stabbing or alleged stabbing attacks. In addition, 29 Palestinian children were injured by Israeli settlers and 3 by unexploded ordnances.

91. In the Qiryat Arba' settlement, 1 thirteen-year-old Israeli girl was stabbed to death by 1 seventeen-year-old Palestinian boy who was subsequently killed by an Israeli settler, while in the West Bank 11 Israeli children were injured: 10 children were injured by Palestinian civilians in incidents of stone-throwing (8) and gunfire (2) towards vehicles and 1 child was injured by shrapnel from live ammunition fired by Israeli forces.

92. In Gaza, 3 boys were killed by Israeli forces and 30 children (27 boys, 3 girls) were injured: 25 children were injured by Israeli forces, 4 by unexploded ordnances and 1 by crossfire. On 12 March, 1 six-year-old boy and 1 nine-year-old boy were killed and their twelve-year-old brother was injured when Israeli security forces fired missiles in response to rocket fire into Israel at a site reportedly used by the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades adjacent to their home in Baht Lahya.

93. In Israel, after he reportedly stabbed and injured an Israeli civilian, 1 seventeen-year-old Palestinian boy was killed in Petah Tiqua on 8 March. At least 2 Israeli children were injured in attacks by Palestinians conducted in Israel, including in a suicide attack on a bus in West Jerusalem on 18 April, which Hamas praised.

94. In the West Bank, the United Nations documented 74 incidents of attacks on schools or protected persons in the context of operations by Israeli security forces, clashes in and around schools or closure of schools as a result of attacks, with over 8,000 students affected, particularly in Bethlehem, Hebron, Nablus and Ramallah Governorates. Incidents resulted in damage to 3 schools, injury and physical assault of students: 68 incidents were attributed to Israeli security forces and 6 to Israeli

settlers. The United Nations also documented the disruption of access to education resulting from the closure of schools, search operations, detention of students and school personnel, as well as delays to the schedules of students and teachers caused by checkpoints.

95. The United Nations documented the confiscation of a donor-funded mobile health clinic by the Israeli authorities in December, which affected access to health-care services for 93 children in the Markez and Halawah communities in Hebron Governorate. In 2016, 26 per cent of child applications to cross the Erez checkpoint out of Gaza for medical treatment were delayed, affecting 2,490 children (1,026 girls, 1,464 boys), and 1 per cent were denied, affecting 87 children, representing the highest percentage of delayed and denied applications since 2010.

Developments and concerns

96. I note with grave concern the ongoing killing and maiming of children in Israel and the State of Palestine and voice my preoccupation regarding the potential recruitment and use of children in Gaza. I urge all parties to abide by their obligations under international law in order to protect children. I also call upon the Government of Israel to reconsider its imposition of administrative detention for children and to prioritize alternatives to detention in line with international juvenile justice principles contained in, inter alia, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (the Beijing Rules).

Lebanon

97. Heavy clashes in the north Biqa' valley and the Ein El-Helweh Palestine refugee camp, bomb attacks and sporadic violence in border areas continued to have an impact on children.

Grave violations

98. The United Nations documented the recruitment and use of children by armed groups, with several dozen uniformed boys seen with arms in Arsal, north Biqa' valley. Armed groups, including ISIL and the Nusrah Front (also known as Jabhat Fath al-Sham) were active on the outskirts of Arsal in the reporting period. Consistent with my previous reports, boys were reportedly trafficked to fight in the Syrian Arab Republic. Children from northern Baalbek-Hermel Governorate reportedly joined Hizbullah. Other children, mostly from Wadi Khalid in Akkar or Arsal, allegedly joined ISIL. A total of 18 children, including 4 children from twelve to fourteen years old, were also seen wearing uniforms and, in most cases, holding weapons during patrols or celebrations in 2 Palestine refugee camps in southern Lebanon.

99. Children continue to be held in pretrial detention under military jurisdiction on charges relating to terrorism or national security, following their alleged association with armed groups in Lebanon or the Syrian Arab Republic: 10 boys were arrested during the reporting period and 6 remained in detention as at December, along with 3 others detained before 2016.

100. The United Nations verified 8 child casualties (4 boys, 4 girls) caused by stray bullets, shrapnel during clashes and a car bomb. The majority of cases were documented in Bekaa Governorate.

101. Two United Nations schools were damaged during violence between armed factions in Ein el-Helweh Palestine refugee camp and 1 school in Beirut was damaged

by a car bomb explosion, while 4 cases of attacks on health services were verified in Baalbek-Hermel Governorate (3) and the Ein el-Helweh refugee camp (1). On 27 June, 1 medical professional was killed and 1 ambulance was destroyed in multiple suicide attacks on the village of al-Qaa in northern Biqa'.

102. Following repeated armed clashes in the Ein el-Helweh camp, 19 United Nations schools suspended classes for 1 to 10 days, with over 10,000 students affected, while 2 United Nations health centres also suspended activities for 11 to 13 days.

Developments and concerns

103. In the light of the continued recruitment and use of children by armed groups and the continued detention of children for alleged association with armed groups, I reiterate my call for the Government to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, to treat children associated with armed groups primarily as victims and to use the detention of children as a last resort, pursuant to international juvenile justice standards.

Libya

104. Conflict continued throughout Libya, particularly around Benghazi, Sabha, Sirte and Tripoli. In May, forces affiliated with the Presidency Council began an offensive to retake Sirte from ISIL, which lasted until early December. Monitoring continued to be restricted by insecurity, with the majority of United Nations staff remaining located outside Libya.

Grave violations

105. The recruitment and use of children by armed groups was documented. Groups pledging allegiance to ISIL reportedly ran a training camp for children and adolescents south of Sirte. On 4 January, a 15-year-old boy from Tripoli was reportedly used by ISIL to conduct a suicide attack in Sidra'. Children were also deprived of liberty as a result of their alleged association with parties to conflict.

106. At least 51 children were reportedly killed and 68 injured by air strikes, shelling, small arms fire, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war. The highest number of casualties was documented in Benghazi. The United Nations documented a pattern of incidents involving the use of indiscriminate weapons in heavily populated or residential areas.

107. The United Nations documented 14 incidents of attacks against health facilities or personnel across Libya. Shelling, vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices and air strikes killed at least 4 health-care personnel, damaged medical facilities and caused their closure. The abduction of 4 nurses to treat fighters was also documented.

108. The abduction of children continued to be reported, particularly in western Libya. The United Nations verified incidents affecting at least 3 boys and 1 girl. For example, on 4 November, the body of 1 four-year-old girl was found in the al-Ma'mura neighbourhood of Warshafanah, 15 days after she was abducted by an unidentified armed group.

109. The United Nations documented 1 incident of denial of humanitarian access: in August, food assistance for families in Darnah was reportedly confiscated by local authorities and redirected to Ajdabiya.

Developments and concerns

110. I am concerned about the impact of the volatile security situation on children in Libya. In this regard, I welcome the agreement concluded between the municipality of Zintan and the United Nations for the release and reintegration of children involved in armed conflict and call for support for similar efforts throughout Libya.

Mali

111. The lack of State authority in northern regions led to heightened security threats, which expanded to central regions and caused child casualties and displacement. Progress in the implementation of the 2015 peace accord was stalled as fighting resumed in July between signatory armed groups. The reporting period was also marked by attacks and threats against education personnel, intercommunal tensions and an increase in asymmetric attacks against national and international forces.

Grave violations

112. The presence of children among armed groups remained an issue of concern, with 442 cases of recruitment and use of children, of which 78 were verified and attributed to the Platform coalition of armed groups (54), Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA) (18) and Al Mourabitoun (3). This represents an increase compared with the 27 cases verified in 2015, which may be attributed to both improved monitoring and renewed fighting. The increase also affected girls. For example, 14 girls were used in support roles by the Groupe d'autodéfense des Touaregs Imghad et leurs alliés (GATIA)/the Platform coalition of armed groups in Gao region. In some instances, signatory armed groups inflated their numbers with children to benefit from disarmament, demobilization and reintegration packages. In the context of registration and screening of Platform coalition of armed groups and CMA combatants in Gao in December to establish mixed patrols, 10 children were identified but had still not been handed over to child protection actors as at early 2017.

113. As at December, 5 of 13 children arrested and detained on security charges in 2016 remained in detention. The United Nations continued advocacy with the national authorities to ensure their release in line with the handover protocol signed in 2013.

114. The United Nations verified the killing of 12 children and the maiming of 35 children during rocket attacks and crossfire, as well as in improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war incidents. Almost one third of the victims were injured in Kidal and its vicinity during clashes between the Platform coalition of armed groups and CMA in July and August.

115. Rape and other forms of sexual violence continued to be underreported: 6 cases were documented, of which 2 were verified, including 1 attempted rape of a seven-year-old girl by a member of the Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad-Platform coalition of armed groups and the attempted rape of 1 four-year-old girl by an alleged element of Mouvement pour l'unification et le jihad en Afrique de l'ouest. The 4 unverified cases concerned 4 girls associated with GATIA in the Gao region.

116. A total of 6 attacks and threats of attacks on schools and protected personnel and 9 attacks against medical personnel were verified in Ménaka, Mopti and Timbuktu, none of which could be attributed. On 4 April, an attack by armed individuals against a medical team from Timbuktu led to the suspension of a vaccination campaign. Attacks and threats against educational staff, students and

parents were prevalent, particularly in Mopti region. On 11 July, the director of a school was killed by armed elements allegedly hostile to "Western education" and State authorities. As at December, 367 schools remained closed in the conflict-affected regions.

117. In addition, 14 schools were militarily used by armed groups in Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu, of which 2 were vacated by CMA and CMA/Haut Conseil pour l'unité de l'Azawad. The military use of 8 schools by the Platform coalition of armed groups and CMA in Gao and Timbuktu regions was under verification as at March 2017, while 1 facility used by the Malian defence and security forces in Ménaka region was vacated in early 2017.

118. A total of 7 boys from seven to fifteen years old were abducted in 5 verified incidents, 2 of which were perpetrated by CMA: 4 of the incidents, affecting 5 boys including a relative of a CMA commander, occurred in Kidal. In October, 2 other boys under the age of ten, sons of a prominent figure in the peace process, were abducted in Bamako and released three weeks later.

119. A total of 43 incidents of denial of humanitarian access were verified, including armed robbery, carjacking and kidnapping of humanitarian workers, none of which could be attributed. At least 2 entities were forced to temporarily suspend their humanitarian programmes in Mopti and Timbuktu regions.

Developments and concerns

120. I welcome the signature by CMA of an action plan with the United Nations in March 2017 to end and prevent grave violations against children, which I urge them to swiftly implement. Moreover, in June, the Platform coalition of armed groups signed a unilateral communiqué to address conflict-related sexual violence. However, I am seriously concerned about the high level of cases of recruitment and use of children attributed to the Platform coalition of armed groups, including specifically to GATIA, and I urge the leadership to take immediate action and work with the United Nations to release children and end this practice.

121. In December, following United Nations advocacy, a national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme with child protection provisions was adopted and a senior defence representative was appointed for women and child protection issues within the newly established national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration commission. I encourage all those involved in the cantonment process to implement age assessment mechanisms and ensure that children are identified and transferred to child protection actors. I further encourage subregional organizations to support these efforts.

Myanmar

122. Despite the ongoing peace process between the Government and a number of armed groups, conflict intensified in Kachin and Shan States, while sporadic skirmishes continued in Kayin State and other parts of the south-east.

123. There were also significant outbreaks of violence affecting the Rohingya community in Rakhine State, with the resumption of fighting between the Arakan Army and the Tatmadaw and military operations following separate attacks on border guard posts on 9 October. While the United Nations was not been granted access to the affected areas, accounts of serious human rights violations by government security forces, including killing and maiming of children and sexual violence against children, have been documented.

Grave violations

124. The United Nations received 489 reports of the recruitment and use of children and verified 127 cases (123 boys, 4 girls), 21 of which occurred in 2016: 2 verified cases of use of children in the current reporting period were attributed to the Tatmadaw and 4 cases of recruitment of children were under joint review as at early 2017. An additional 99 verified cases were attributed to the Tatmadaw but occurred before 2016, while 17 verified cases were attributed to armed groups, comprising the Kayan New Land Party (KNLP) (10) and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) (7).

125. The United Nations documented 9 suspected cases of children held in military detention for being absent without leave from the army: following notification, the Tatmadaw returned them to their regiments pending age verification. In addition, 1 child used as a cook by the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army was held in military detention following his capture and a number of children as young as 10 have been held by the Border Guard Police in northern Rakhine State on charges of "unlawful association" since November 2016, while 1 thirteen-year old boy died in detention in February 2017.

126. The United Nations documented 51 incidents of killing and maiming of children, of which 19 were verified (6 children killed, 13 injured): 6 verified incidents were attributed to the Tatmadaw, including 2 targeted killings, and 2 incidents each were attributed to KIA and Ta'ang National Liberation Army, and 1 to the Arakan Army. At least 8 cases of the killing of children by security forces in Rakhine State were also documented.

127. The United Nations verified 2 cases of sexual violence against 2 girls (four and nine years old) by Tatmadaw soldiers. Both cases were referred to civilian courts and judicial proceedings were initiated. In addition, at least 7 cases of sexual violence were documented against Rohingya girls as young as eleven during military operations in northern Rakhine State.

128. A total of 6 incidents of attacks on schools were reported, of which 2 could be verified: 1 incident was attributed to the Tatmadaw and 1 incident was jointly attributed to the Tatmadaw and the KIA during crossfire, resulting in the injury of 1 teacher. In addition, 2 cases of military use of schools by the Tatmadaw were documented in Kachin and Rakhine States.

129. The United Nations received 30 reports of the abduction of children, an increase compared with 2015. Verified incidents involved 20 children and were attributed to KIA (5), KNLP (1) and the Tatmadaw (1).

130. Humanitarian access to conflict-affected areas decreased significantly in 2016, especially in Kachin, northern Shan and Rakhine States, in particular following the suspension in October of all access to Rakhine State. In August, the Tatmadaw prevented the delivery of medicine to camps for internally displaced persons in eastern Kachin State.

Developments and concerns

131. I note the steps taken by the Government towards implementing its action plan, including through issuance of military directives; training on age assessment guidelines; accountability measures taken against 440 military personnel, including 86 officers; and the release of 101 children and youth from the Tatmadaw in 2016. I urge the Government to accelerate the joint age verification process to allow for the expeditious release of child recruits, to continue collaboration on strengthening accountability mechanisms for all perpetrators of grave violations and to finalize all aspects of the joint action plan. In this regard, I encourage the swift passage of the

revised Child Law, which includes a chapter on children and armed conflict and corresponding penalties.

132. During 2016, the United Nations engaged with all armed groups listed in the annexes to the present report with a view to ending and preventing violations against children and encouraging the development of action plans. I urge the Government to facilitate the signature of action plans with armed groups, especially those with which they have engaged in peace talks.

Somalia

133. The security situation remained highly volatile, with continued attacks by Al-Shabaab on the Somali security forces, government officials and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), as well as inter-clan clashes. The Somali National Army and AMISOM continued joint offensives against Al-Shabaab. Military forces of Ethiopia, Kenya and the United States of America also conducted operations against the group.

Grave violations

134. The number of children recruited and used doubled (1,915) compared with 2015 as a result of a twofold increase in cases attributed to Al-Shabaab (1,206). In September, Al-Shabaab compelled elders in the Galguduud region to persuade children to join the group, leading to the recruitment of 100 boys. Children were also recruited and used by clan militias (447), the Somali National Army (182) and Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (78). The use of 17 children by AMISOM was documented.

135. Regarding detention, 386 children were held by the Government for their alleged association with Al-Shabaab. As mentioned in my report on children and armed conflict in Somalia (S/2016/1098), children were captured or arrested during military and security operations, including mass security sweeps or house searches. In May, the Galmudug Interim Administration handed over to child protection actors 44 children allegedly associated with Al-Shabaab whom the group had captured in March. In October, the Puntland authorities also handed over 26 children from twelve to fourteen years old.

136. The Puntland authorities treated as adults 40 other captured children from fifteen to seventeen years old, in contravention of the obligations of Somalia under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; they were given lengthy sentences of 10 to 20 years' imprisonment or even sentenced to death. In January 2017, after sustained high-level United Nations advocacy, the death sentences were commuted to 20 years of imprisonment: at the time of preparation of the present report, those children had been handed over to child protection actors and the United Nations continued to engage with authorities on the legal status of the released children, whose prison sentences remained in effect.

137. A total of 1,121 children were killed and maimed by unknown armed elements (482), Al-Shabaab (290), the Somali National Army (146), clan militias (143), Puntland armed forces (5) and Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (1). Most child casualties resulted from crossfire during military operations, mortar shelling, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war. Among the children killed by Al-Shabaab, at least 30 were publicly executed on suspicion of spying. Child casualties attributed to AMISOM (42) primarily occurred in operations against Al-Shabaab or in indiscriminate fire responding to attacks. Child casualties also resulted from air strikes by the Kenyan defence forces (11) and United States armed forces (1).

138. The United Nations verified incidents of sexual violence affecting 310 girls and 1 boy, attributed to unknown armed elements (96), clan militias (94), the Somali National Army (81), Al-Shabaab (33), Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (3) and Puntland armed forces (1), while 3 cases were attributed to AMISOM. Rape and forced marriage often occurred in the context of abductions; for example, on 16 June, a sixteen-year-old girl, abducted from her house, was gang raped by 5 Somali National Army soldiers in the Bakool region.

139. Attacks on 46 schools and 10 hospitals were verified. Attacks on schools were attributed to Al-Shabaab (31), the Somali National Army (9), Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a and clan militias (2 each) and AMISOM (1). Attacks on hospitals were attributed to Al-Shabaab (5) and clan militias (4). In addition, 1 school and 1 hospital were used by the Somali National Army and 1 health centre by Al-Shabaab. In Gedo region, Ceel Adde secondary school was vacated by AMISOM after being used for six days in January.

140. The number of abductions spiked compared with 2015: 950 children were abducted, 87 per cent of them by Al-Shabaab (827) and most of the others by clan militias (113). Of the cases involving Al-Shabaab, 548 children were abducted for recruitment purposes.

141. Incidents of denial of humanitarian access to children were attributed to clan militias (10), Al-Shabaab (5), the Somali National Army (2) and Puntland armed forces (1). For example, in April in Gedo region, Al-Shabaab ambushed a truck belonging to a non-governmental organization in Ced Adde and stole food, including child nutrition products.

Developments and concerns

142. I welcome the release of children who had been detained for their alleged association with Al-Shabaab in Puntland and Galmudug and I urge that the legal status of the children released be swiftly resolved. Regarding reintegration, the United Nations supported 604 separated children and provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Defence Child Protection Unit. On 6 January, the Somali National Army Chief of the Defence Forces issued a general staff order stating that an individual must be at least eighteen to enlist. I urge subregional organizations to work with my Special Representative to develop a regional dimension for child protection efforts in Somalia.

143. During her visit to Somalia in July 2016, my Special Representative urged the authorities to implement their 2012 action plans signed with the United Nations and to treat children associated with armed groups primarily as victims, with the best interests of the child and international protection standards as guiding principles. My Special Representative also raised concerns with AMISOM about grave violations.

South Sudan

144. The security situation deteriorated following clashes in Juba in July between the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition, as well as the subsequent split within the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition. Overall in 2016, the level of violations against children remained at a similar level to that of 2015 and displacement continued at high levels.

Grave violations

145. The United Nations verified 169 incidents of recruitment and use affecting at least 1,022 children, 61 per cent of which were attributed to SPLA (574) and other government security forces (50). Children were also recruited and used by the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (115), the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition allied with Taban Deng Gai (207), the South Sudan Democratic Army-Cobra Faction (SSDA-CF) (32), Johnson Olony's armed group (25), the South Sudan People's Patriotic Front (16) and the South Sudan National Liberation Movement (SSNLM) (3). Children were observed wearing military uniforms and carrying weapons in the greater Upper Nile, Equatoria and Bahr el-Ghazal regions. The United Nations verified reports of children transported by SPLA from Jonglei, Lakes and Unity states to other parts of the country for military training and deployment. According to first-hand testimony, in one incident 100 boys were affected, while 40 boys previously released by SSDA-CF were recruited again but following United Nations advocacy all but two were released again.

146. A total of 101 incidents of killing and maiming of children, affecting 108 and 71 children, respectively, were verified, mostly in Western Bahr el-Ghazal and Central Equatoria. Children were killed and maimed by SPLA (104), the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (6), the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition allied to Taban Deng Gai (3) and the South Sudan National Police Service (3). Children were also killed and maimed by crossfire and unexploded ordnances (63). Some were deliberately fired at while fleeing SPLA, including at close range.

147. The United Nations verified 142 cases of sexual violence against girls, including 26 who were gang-raped. Most cases were documented in Unity and Equatoria regions and were attributed to SPLA (114), South Sudan People's Patriotic Front (15), other government security forces (7) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (6). After the outbreak of conflict In Juba in July, girls were raped as they left the protection of civilian sites or at checkpoints.

148. Attacks on 17 schools and hospitals were reported, including in protection of civilian sites, carried out by SPLA (10) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (3).

149. Attacks on 28 health facilities and 2 medical personnel were verified, with the majority of cases attributed to SPLA (19) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (5). More than two thirds of the attacks occurred in the Equatoria region.

150. A total of 21 schools were newly used for military purposes, with the majority of cases attributed to SPLA (10) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (7).

151. A total of 17 incidents of abduction were verified, affecting approximately 180 children mostly in Unity and Western Equatoria, with the majority attributed to SPLA, SSPPF and the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition. In 1 large-scale incident in Unity, approximately 100 boys as young as fourteen were abducted by SPLA for recruitment purposes and transferred to Juba for military training.

152. A total of 445 incidents of denial of humanitarian access were verified, almost twice as many as in 2015. Most incidents were attributed to SPLA (182) and government security forces and institutions (179), followed by the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (54). Incidents included attacks on personnel and compounds, looting of warehouses and humanitarian assets, and bureaucratic constraints and restriction of movement. In a particularly troubling example in

Upper Nile in May, SPLA fired on humanitarian workers attempting to reach populations in need.

Developments and concerns

153. The scale of violations affecting children in South Sudan continued to be alarming. I urge leaders to abide by their responsibilities to protect children. I call upon all parties to cooperate with the African Union in the implementation of the peace agreement and I encourage the inclusion of child protection concerns in the national dialogue.

154. I am concerned that the implementation of the action plan by SPLA and the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition has stalled as a result of the ongoing conflict. In this regard, I call upon these parties to resume the implementation of their action plans and note that the action plan for the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition applies equally to any splinter elements. It is encouraging, however, that following United Nations advocacy, 32 boys in Unity, were released by SPLA (25) and the South Sudan National Wildlife Service (7). In Jonglei, 148 boys were released, including 3 associated with SPLA, 120 associated with SSDA-CF and 25 associated with the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition.

Sudan

155. Hostilities continued in early 2016 but reduced in the second half of the year. In Darfur, military operations by the Government focused on dislodging the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid from Jebel Mara. In June, the Government announced a unilateral ceasefire in Darfur although skirmishes continued. At the same time, there were confrontations between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) in Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan States. In April and June, respectively, SPLM-N and the Government announced ceasefires, which were still in place as at early 2017; however, hostilities continued sporadically and access for the United Nations to areas under the control of SPLM-N remained constrained. A detailed account of the effects of armed conflict on children is available in my country report (S/2017/191).

Grave violations: Darfur

156. While allegations regarding the recruitment and use of 5 boys were received, only 1 was verified and attributed to the former Liberation and Justice Movement in Central Darfur.

157. A total of 109 incidents of killing and maiming affecting 199 children (85 killed, 114 maimed) were verified, resulting mostly from shooting (94), unexploded ordnances (55) and aerial bombardments (42); these were attributed to government forces (39) (Sudanese Armed Forces, rapid support forces, national police forces, popular defence forces, National Intelligence and Security Service), pro-government militias (7) and unidentified armed men (37), while 24 incidents related to unexploded ordnances.

158. Incidents of rape affecting 94 girls and 1 boy were verified and attributed to government forces (20) (Sudanese Armed Forces, rapid support forces, Central Reserve Police, national police forces, pro-government militias (18) and the Sudan-Chad Joint Forces (1). Unidentified armed men were responsible for 30 incidents. While efforts were made by the Government to address impunity for crimes of sexual violence against children, only 9 cases resulted in the arrest and sentencing of perpetrators.

159. A total of 20 schools and 6 hospitals were attacked, destroyed and/or looted by the Sudanese Armed Forces (15), the rapid support forces (1), tribal militias (2) and unidentified armed men (8), most as a result of aerial bombardments in Jebel Marra; 3 schools in Central Darfur were also reportedly used by the Sudanese Armed Forces in 2016.

160. A total of 18 incidents of abduction affecting 15 boys and 6 girls were verified and attributed to pro-government militias (10), the Sudanese Armed Forces (2) and unidentified armed men (6).

161. A total of 14 incidents of denial of humanitarian access, such as attacks on humanitarian workers and bureaucratic constraints and restriction of movement, were verified, including 11 by the Sudanese Armed Forces and 1 by the Sudanese Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid. Access continued to be severely impeded, particularly in eastern Jebel Marra.

Grave violations: Southern Kordofan, Blue Nile and Abyei

162. The United Nations received allegations of recruitment and use of boys between twelve and seventeen years old by government forces, particularly in Blue Nile, and by the SPLM-N in the greater Upper Nile region, South Sudan, although no cases could be verified.

163. The killing (2) and maiming (6) of 6 boys and 2 girls was verified and attributed to SPLM-N (2), the Sudanese Armed Forces (1) and the rapid support forces (1); 2 children were also affected by unexploded ordnances and 2 children were affected by an explosion at a military garrison.

164. The rape of 4 girls between thirteen and fifteen years old by Sudanese Armed Forces elements in Blue Nile was verified and reported to the police, resulting in the arrest and sentencing of perpetrators.

165. A total of 4 allegations of attacks on schools (3) and hospitals (1) during air strikes were received but could not be verified. In March, the military use of a school in Kadugli, Southern Kordofan, by the National Intelligence and Security Service was documented.

166. In March, 2 boys of twelve and sixteen were abducted by Misseriya militiamen in Abyei. They were released and reunified with their families following interventions by the United Nations and community networks.

Developments and concerns

167. I commend the Government's ongoing commitment to the action plan signed in March and the significant progress achieved, including through the formation of high-level and technical committees and the development of a workplan. Command orders for dissemination of the action plan were issued and focal points at the rank of Inspector General were appointed to facilitate discussions on access. In March 2017, the Government granted access to the United Nations to areas of Blue Nile to follow up allegations of child recruitment and use of children by its forces.

168. On 29 March, following extensive advocacy, the United Nations was granted access to 21 children who had been detained by the National Intelligence and Security Service for their alleged association with an armed group after their apprehension in Darfur in 2015. The children were released in September, granted a presidential pardon and reunited with their families.

169. Following engagement by my Special Representative and United Nations partners, SPLM-N signed an action plan to end recruitment and use of children in November. In December, SPLM-N issued a command order and appointed a high-

level focal point. In November, the United Nations also met with the leader of the Justice and Equality Movement and a representative of the Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minawi, who both agreed to develop implementation plans to expedite their action plans.

Syrian Arab Republic

170. Widespread conflict continued throughout the Syrian Arab Republic and further escalated in the last quarter of 2016, with intense hostilities in eastern Aleppo city and in Bab and Manbij in Aleppo Governorate. The intensification of hostilities and continuing access restrictions posed considerable challenges for monitoring.

Grave violations

171. The recruitment and use of children increased sharply: the number of verified cases more than doubled compared with 2015. The United Nations verified 851 cases attributed to armed groups self-affiliated with the Free Syrian Army (507), ISIL (133), pro-government militias (54), People's Protection Units (46), government forces (29), Army of Islam (28), Ahrar al-Sham (17), the Nusrah Front (also known as Jabhat Fath al-Sham) (10), Nur al-Din al-Zanki (3) and unidentified armed groups (24); 20 per cent of verified cases involved children under the age of fifteen. Payment of salaries, ideology and family or community influence continued to be incentives. As a result of their association with parties to conflict, at least 37 children were killed and 17 injured.

172. Some 60 per cent of verified cases were attributed to groups affiliated with the Free Syrian Army, a tenfold increase compared with 2015, with most cases occurring in Aleppo, Dar'a and Rif Dimashq Governorates; 98 per cent of the boys recruited by these groups were used for military functions, including front-line combat. At least 103 children were used by ISIL for military functions, including to conduct executions and suicide attacks. People's Protection Units recruited and used 40 boys and 6 girls, who received military training and were used to patrol and guard checkpoints. Children recruited and used by other armed groups (82) predominantly guarded checkpoints.

173. The United Nations verified the association of 29 children with government forces, 5 of whom were trained, armed and used in combat, while the others were deployed at checkpoints, mostly unarmed. Pro-government militias recruited 54 boys, 20 of whom were used in combat and 34 to guard checkpoints. Coercion and financial incentives were used to recruit children.

174. Children continued to be arrested and detained for their alleged association with armed groups. The United Nations verified the arrest and detention of 12 boys by government forces and popular committees. In at least 7 of these cases, children were subjected to torture and ill-treatment.

175. Armed groups also deprived children of liberty for their alleged association with opposing parties to conflict. For example, ISIL deprived 27 boys of their liberty, some as young as ten, 9 of whom were executed and 17 remained unaccounted for as at early 2017.

176. The United Nations verified the killing of 652 children (297 boys, 125 girls, 230 sex unknown) and the maiming of 647 (223 boys, 133 girls, 291 sex unknown) during 2016. These casualties were attributed to government and pro-government forces (708), ISIL (235), People's Protection Units (8), groups affiliated with the Free Syrian Army (5), other armed groups (10) and unidentified armed

groups (145). Verified violations were most prevalent in Aleppo, Rural Damascus, Dar'a and Idlib.

177. A total of 533 of the verified child casualties were caused by air strikes, with 451 casualties attributed to government and pro-government forces and 82 casualties attributed to unidentified parties to conflict. Parties involved in aerial operations in the Syrian Arab Republic included government forces, international forces supporting the Government, members of the international counter-ISIL coalition, Turkey and Israel.

178. A total of 243 of the verified child casualties were attributed to mortar, rocket and improvised explosive device attacks by armed groups on government-held areas. Children continued to be killed and maimed by suicide attacks (70), executions (16), sniper attacks (17) and improvised explosive devices and unexploded ordnances (130). In February, 3 children were publicly beheaded by ISIL after being accused of "spying". In addition, ISIL arrested 41 children for a wide range of acts that it classifies as crimes, some of whom were executed or subjected to amputation.

179. The United Nations verified 8 cases of sexual violence against girls, including rape, forced marriage and sexual slavery: 7 cases were attributed to ISIL and 1 was attributed to the pro-government Shu'aytat militias. Accounts were received of ISIL fighters demanding marriage of girls living in ISIL-held areas. In 1 verified case, a fourteen-year-old girl was abducted and gang-raped by 6 ISIL fighters after her family refused marriage. Reports also indicated that Yazidi girls captured in Iraq in 2014 continued to be trafficked into and within the Syrian Arab Republic and used as sex slaves. Trauma from sexual violence and social stigma continued to deter child survivors from coming forward.

180. The United Nations verified 76 attacks on schools and 11 attacks on education personnel resulting in 28 casualties among education personnel, a 40 per cent increase compared with 2015. These attacks were attributed to government and pro-government forces (57, including 38 air strikes), ISIL (6), People's Protection Units (1) and unidentified armed groups (14). Verified attacks on schools caused 255 child casualties and mostly occurred in Aleppo and Idlib Governorates. For example, in October the Kamal Qal'aji school complex in Idlib Governorate was hit by consecutive pro-government air strikes that killed 3 teachers and 19 children, injured 61 children and severely damaged the school.

181. The United Nations verified 81 attacks on medical facilities and 30 incidents of attacks on medical personnel resulting in 29 child casualties and 94 casualties among medical personnel, a nearly threefold increase compared with 2015. These attacks were attributed to government and pro-government forces (93, including 61 air strikes), ISIL (7), groups affiliated with the Free Syrian Army (2), Ahrar al-Sham (1) and unidentified armed groups (3). The majority of verified violations occurred in Aleppo and Idlib Governorates. In April, 13 children and 4 medical personnel were killed when pro-government attacks hit the Quds hospital in Aleppo Governorate.

182. A total of 9 incidents of military use of schools were attributed to groups affiliated with the Free Syrian Army (5), ISIL (3) and government forces (1), with 2 of those schools subsequently attacked by opposing forces, while 4 incidents of military use of medical facilities were attributed to ISIL.

183. The United Nations verified the abductions of 43 children that were attributed to ISIL (34), People's Protection Units (8), and government forces and pro-government militias (1). People's Protection Units abducted at least 8 children for recruitment purposes.

184. Parties to the conflict continued to use siege and denial of access to water as tactics of war, and as at end-2016, an estimated 292,000 children were trapped in besieged areas. The Government was responsible for 80 per cent of the instances of besiegement and ISIL was responsible for 17 per cent. Essential medicines were removed or excluded from humanitarian convoys by government authorities, while more than 411,000 children targeted by polio vaccination campaigns were not reached due to deliberate denial of access by ISIL and the Nusrah Front.

185. The United Nations verified 90 instances of denial of humanitarian access, including 37 cases of deliberate denial of humanitarian services, 32 attacks on humanitarian facilities and related personnel and 21 acts of besiegement. Verified cases were attributed to government and pro-government forces (59), ISIL (15), Free Syrian Army-affiliated groups (2), the Nusrah Front (2), the Army of Islam (1) and unidentified armed groups (5). In September, a United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) humanitarian convoy was hit by air strikes in rural western Aleppo, killing 17 staff and the head of the Urum al-Kubra branch of SARC.

Developments and concerns

186. The continued level of violations against children in the Syrian Arab Republic remains highly alarming and I urge all parties to engage in the inclusive and Syrian-led peace process under United Nations auspices aimed at ending conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. I also call upon all parties to abide by their obligations under international law, and I urge the Government to take all possible measures to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by their armed forces and pro-government militias.

Yemen

187. A cessation of hostilities was in effect from April until peace talks adjourned in early August. During this period, while fighting continued in many locations, there was a significant decrease in the number of child casualties, in particular those resulting from air strikes, and in the number of attacks on schools and hospitals, although the intensification of hostilities following the adjournment led to increased violations. Throughout 2016, the documentation of violations against children was constrained by access restrictions and insecurity.

Grave violations

188. The United Nations verified 517 cases of the recruitment and use of boys as young as eleven, predominantly in Aden, Abyan, Amran, Sana'a and Ta'izz. The decrease in verified incidents compared with 2015 (917) reflects the challenges in monitoring rather than a reduction in cases. A further 105 reported cases could not be verified during 2016. The majority of verified cases (359) were attributed to the Houthis and affiliated forces, while 50 cases were attributed to the pro-government Popular Resistance, 29 to Ansar al-Sharia, 27 to Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and 26 to the Yemeni Armed Forces. Children were mainly used to guard checkpoints and buildings, patrol areas and act as porters. In 69 verified cases, mostly in Amran and Aden, boys were used in combat, while 2 boys were killed and 5 injured at checkpoints or on the battlefield. Recruits for the Popular Resistance were often motivated by a desire to secure income for their families. In 1 verified case on 19 June, 5 boys recruited by the Popular Resistance, who were armed and wearing military uniforms, were queueing inside a government building in Jawf to collect salaries.

189. The United Nations documented the arrest or detention of 10 boys on the basis of their suspected association with an opposing party to conflict, 7 of which cases

were attributed to the Yemeni Armed Forces and 3 to the Popular Resistance. In June, as part of a confidence-building measure during peace talks facilitated by the United Nations, the coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen led by Saudi Arabia released 52 children who had reportedly been associated with parties to conflict. The children were handed over to the Government of Yemen and some were reunified with their families.

190. The killing and maiming of children remained the most prevalent violation. The United Nations verified 1,340 child casualties, with 502 children killed (345 boys, 152 girls, 5 sex unknown) and 838 injured (620 boys, 218 girls): 683 were attributed to the coalition, 414 to the Houthis and affiliated forces, 17 to the Popular Resistance, 6 to the Yemeni Armed Forces, 6 to ISIL in Yemen and 1 to Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula.

191. The highest number of child casualties was documented in Ta'izz, where 72 per cent (343 of 474 casualties) were attributed to the Houthis, mainly resulting from ground fighting. In 2016, ground fighting accounted for 39 per cent of all child casualties, causing the death of 107 children and injuries to 421 children. Large numbers of child casualties were also documented in Sa'dah, where 91 per cent (222 of 245 casualties) were attributed to air strikes by the coalition. In the reporting period, air strikes were the cause of over half of all child casualties, with at least 349 children killed and 334 children injured. For example, in October a coalition air strike hit Salah Hall in Sana'a during a funeral, killing at least 24 children.

192. A total of 113 child casualties were also attributed to landmines and unexploded ordnances, including in Aden, where armed groups allegedly planted landmines as they retreated. In addition, a number of civilians were reportedly killed in Saudi Arabia as a result of cross-border attacks.

193. The United Nations verified 52 incidents of attacks on schools and hospitals, resulting in the partial or complete destruction of facilities (46), attacks on protected personnel (3) and looting (3): 73 per cent of attacks were attributed to the coalition (28 schools, 10 hospitals) and 15 per cent to the Houthis and affiliated forces (4 schools; 4 hospitals). Attacks were also attributed to the Popular Resistance (2), the Yemeni Armed Forces (1) and crossfire.

194. A total of 33 attacks on schools were verified, affecting 30 schools: the majority of the incidents (28) resulted in the destruction of schools as a result of air strikes by the coalition, while 4 incidents were attributed to the Houthis and 1 to the Yemeni Armed Forces.

195. The United Nations verified 19 incidents of attacks on hospitals affecting 16 facilities, with hospitals being subjected to multiple attacks in Ta'izz and Marib, 10 of which were attributed to air strikes by the coalition; for example, on 10 January in Sa'ada Governorate, 1 hospital was hit by an air strike, resulting in 4 deaths, 10 injuries and the destruction of several hospital buildings. Of the remaining verified attacks, 4 were attributed to the Houthis in Ta'izz and Jawf and 2 to the Popular Resistance.

196. A total of 12 incidents of the military use of schools were documented: 6 were attributed to the Houthis, 4 to the Popular Resistance and 1 each to the Yemeni Armed Forces and Ansar al-Sharia, while 5 of the schools used were subsequently attacked. In addition, 2 incidents of the military use of hospitals occurred in Jawf and were attributed to the Houthis and to the Popular Resistance.

197. During 2016, 4 boys were abducted, 3 by unidentified armed groups in Ma'rib and Hudaydah and 1 by AQAP in Bayda' for ransom.

198. The United Nations received 220 reports of incidents of denial of humanitarian access, which involved bureaucratic constraints and restriction of movement (149), violence against humanitarian workers, assets and facilities (43) and interference with the implementation of humanitarian activities (28). The majority of incidents were documented and verified in Hudaydah, Sana'a, Ta'izz and Hajjah, and were attributed to the Houthis (181), unidentified armed groups (17), the coalition (13) and the Popular Resistance (9).

Developments and concerns

199. The action plan signed by the Government of Yemen in 2014 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Yemeni Armed Forces remained stalled owing to the ongoing conflict. However, the United Nations and its partners provided support for reintegration to 100 children separated from armed groups in Aden.

200. The United Nations also engaged in enhanced dialogue with parties to conflict, including through several interactions between the Office of my Special Representative and Saudi Arabia, as leader of the coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen, to address ongoing grave violations against children. The United Nations was informed of measures taken by the coalition in 2016 to reduce the impact of conflict on children, including through their rules of engagement and the establishment of a joint incident assessment team mandated to review all incidents involving civilian casualties and identify corrective actions. These initiatives are steps in the right direction. Nevertheless, I urge the coalition to improve its approach since, despite these measures, grave violations against children continued at unacceptably high levels in 2016. In this regard, I remain deeply concerned about the plight of children in Yemen and strongly request parties to take urgent measures to end violations against children. Furthermore, I urge the coalition, in particular Saudi Arabia as leader of the coalition, to continue to refine and fully implement the preventive and corrective measures put in place in 2016 to protect children, and to deepen its engagement with the United Nations and my Special Representative on this issue. In this regard, I wish to note that at the time of preparation of the present report, Saudi Arabia has created a child protection unit at the coalition headquarters.

B. Situations not on the agenda of the Security Council or other situations

India

201. Children continued to be affected by incidents of violence between armed groups and the Government, in particular in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, as well as tensions in Jammu and Kashmir.

Grave violations

202. The United Nations continued to receive reports of the recruitment and use of children by armed groups, including the Naxalites, in particular in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. Owing to access restrictions for monitoring and reporting, the United Nations was unable to verify these incidents. Armed groups reportedly resorted to abduction and threats against parents in order to recruit children, who subsequently underwent military training and served as messengers, informants or guards in child squads (*bal dasta*). In March, the police relocated 23 children under threat of abduction by armed groups in Gumla district, Jharkhand, and supported their enrolment in schools. However, unverified reports suggest that police may be using

children formerly associated with armed groups as informants, potentially making them targets for retaliation.

203. Children continued to be killed and injured in the context of operations of national security forces against Maoist armed groups. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, the number of civilians killed in these encounters increased to 213, compared with 171 in 2015; however, no disaggregated data on children were available.

204. According to government information, at least 30 schools were burned and partially destroyed by armed groups in Jammu and Kashmir. In addition, government reports confirmed the military use of 4 schools by security forces in that region for several weeks. In a troubling development, Maoists were allegedly running several schools in Chhattisgarh and included combat training as part of their curriculum.

Developments and concerns

205. In the light of persistent reports of the recruitment and use of children by armed groups, I call upon the Government to develop appropriate mechanisms to protect children from recruitment, as well as to separate and reintegrate recruited children. The United Nations stands ready to assist in this process. I also urge the Government to ensure the protection of children from any form of violence in the context of civil unrest or law and order operations.

Nigeria

206. With the loss of territory to the Nigerian security forces, Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad, commonly known as Boko Haram, intensified attacks on civilians in north-east Nigeria as well as in neighbouring countries, including through suicide bombings, and in late 2016 split into two factions. In this context, 402 incidents of grave violations affecting 2,698 children were verified. A detailed account of the impact of armed conflict on children in Nigeria is available in my country report (S/2017/304).

Grave violations

207. The number of verified cases of the recruitment and use of children in 2016 (2,122) increased significantly compared with 2015 (278). The main perpetrators were Boko Haram (1,947) and the Civilian Joint Task Force (175): 4 boys and 26 girls were used by Boko Haram to carry out suicide attacks in Nigeria (19) and in Cameroon, Chad and the Niger (11). Children associated with the Civilian Joint Task Force were mostly used in support functions.

208. In 2016, 237 children were detained for their alleged association with Boko Haram, while 1,128 children were detained on the basis of their parent's alleged affiliation. While most were released, 336 children were still in detention as at December, including 71 held since 2015.

209. The killing of 304 children and maiming of 184 children was verified, a 27 per cent increase compared with 2015. More than half of the casualties were girls. The majority of casualties resulted from suicide attacks, including children used in these incidents, while internally displaced persons camps were the target of suicide attacks in 7 incidents. Boko Haram was responsible for 97 per cent of child casualties (475). The killing of suspected child suicide bombers by the Nigerian security forces was also a growing concern, with 13 children killed in November and December.

210. The rape or other forms of sexual violence perpetrated by Boko Haram against 51 girls as young as nine was verified. In addition, 3 girls between fourteen and seventeen years old were raped by Nigerian security forces elements. Allegations were also received of 19 cases of sexual abuse of girls in camps for internally displaced persons, reportedly perpetrated by Nigerian security forces elements, camp officials, the Civilian Joint Task Force and vigilantes. The investigation ordered by the Government culminated in the arrest of 8 suspected perpetrators.

211. No attacks on schools and hospitals were documented in Nigeria in 2016; however, Boko Haram perpetrated 3 attacks on schools and 5 on hospitals in the Diffa region of the Niger; 1 attack on a medical centre resulted in the killing of a health worker. A total of 7 schools were verified as militarily used by the Nigerian security forces in Borno (5) and Yobe States (2), 2 of which were vacated in early 2017.

212. Boko Haram abducted 17 boys and 17 girls in 2016. In addition, 2,046 child abductions from previous years were documented in liberated areas following Nigerian security forces operations; 106 of the Chibok schoolgirls abducted in 2014 were freed, partly as a result of internationally supported negotiations between Boko Haram and the Government.

213. A single incident of denial of humanitarian access was verified: on 28 July, 2 staff members were injured by unidentified assailants in an attack on a United Nations humanitarian convoy returning to Maiduguri, following which United Nations operations to Bama were suspended for 18 days.

Developments and concerns

214. I commend the efforts made by the Government to improve the protection of children, including the development of a plan of action to implement the Safe Schools Declaration, which was endorsed in 2015. Moreover, since April, the United Nations has been granted access to children detained in Giwa barracks, enabling the release and reintegration of 1,300 children.

215. Following the listing of the Civilian Joint Task Force for recruitment and use in my previous report (A/70/836-S/2016/360), the United Nations initiated dialogue with that group to develop an action plan to end and prevent recruitment and use of children. In this regard, I welcome the fact that at the time of preparation of the present report, the action plan had been signed.

216. Lastly, a total of 765 girl victims of sexual violence by Boko Haram were provided with support in Maiduguri through a UNICEF-funded community-based rehabilitation programme that aims to address negative community perceptions of girls and women who have survived sexual violence. I encourage subregional organizations to support these efforts.

Pakistan

217. Attacks by armed groups declined by 28 per cent in 2016, with 441 incidents reported. The majority of the incidents were attributed to Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The security operation launched against armed groups in North Waziristan in 2014 concluded in April 2016, although a significant military presence remained.

Grave violations

218. Reports of the recruitment and use of children, including from madrassas, continued to be a concern and incidents of the use of children by armed groups for suicide bombings were reported. In a particularly troubling incident, on

12 November at least 52 people were killed and more than 100 wounded when a teenage suicide bomber blew himself up at the Shah Noorani shrine in Balochistan.

219. Age-disaggregated data on civilian casualties were extremely limited but the majority of incidents affecting children were reported in Balochistan. For example, on 7 February at least 10 people, including 1 girl, were reportedly killed in a suicide attack on a Pakistan Armed Forces vehicle in Quetta. Attacks also occurred in other parts of the country. In Lahore, a suicide attack on 27 March in a public park claimed the lives of 74 people, including 29 children. On 17 October, at least 1 child was killed in a bomb attack at an imambargah in Karachi, which was claimed by Lashkarh-e Jhangvi al-Alami.

220. A total of 6 attacks were carried out on educational institutions in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. On 20 February in South Waziristan, armed elements blew up part of a newly constructed government school, while on 25 November, TTP claimed responsibility for a bomb attack on a government primary school in Mohmand Agency, reportedly for promoting "Western values".

221. Attacks on health care by armed groups continued in 2016, including direct attacks on and threats and intimidation against polio vaccinators, which was condemned by the Government. The majority of incidents occurred in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and led to the killing of at least 1 vaccinator.

Developments and concerns

222. In November, Pakistan ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. I welcome this important step and urge the Government to uphold its obligations under the Optional Protocol, particularly by criminalizing the recruitment and use of children in hostilities.

Philippines

223. Children continued to be affected by low-intensity armed engagements, as well as large-scale military operations conducted by government forces against armed groups, primarily in Mindanao. Owing to the intensification of activities of armed groups in Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao and Sulu, access for monitoring was challenging. Following the resumption of peace talks between the Government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines/New People's Army (NDFP/NPA) in the second half of 2016, grave violations during clashes between them decreased significantly.

Grave violations

224. The United Nations verified the recruitment and use of 9 boys between thirteen and seventeen years old. Of the verified cases, 8 were attributed to armed groups, 5 to the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and 3 to NPA. As well as being used in support roles, some boys attended training in arms and were used in combat: 1 child recruited by NPA died during a skirmish with the Armed Forces of the Philippines. In addition, credible reports suggest that the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, the Abu Sayyaf Group and the Maute Group recruited children for combat. In addition, 1 verified incident was attributed to the Armed Forces of the Philippines, which has used 1 boy in a support role in Negros Occidental since 2013.

225. The United Nations documented the detention of 8 children without a formal judicial process for their alleged association with armed groups. For example, despite continued advocacy by the United Nations, 1 fifteen-year-old boy has been detained in an adult prison in Basilan for his alleged association with the Abu Sayyaf Group since November 2015.

226. The United Nations verified the killing and maiming of 38 children (14 killed, 24 injured; 26 boys, 12 girls); the cases were attributed to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (11), the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the national police in a joint operation (2) and alleged pro-government armed groups (New Indigenous People's Army Reform (6) and Alamara (1)). In addition, 4 cases were attributed to the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and 2 to NPA. Along with incidents of crossfire, indiscriminate attacks or explosive remnants of war, children were subjected to targeted killings and alleged torture.

227. A total of 10 attacks affecting 12 schools were verified and were attributed to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (2) and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (1) or were unattributed (7). Reports of threats by alleged pro-government armed groups against teachers working for schools run by non-governmental organizations in indigenous communities were also received. In addition, the United Nations documented the use of 8 schools for military purposes by the Armed Forces of the Philippines and/or the national police (6) and the Maute Group (2), 4 of which schools were attacked while they were occupied.

228. Of 4 reports of abduction received in 2016, one incident, which occurred in December 2015, was verified. In this incident, 1 eight-year-old boy and his parents were taken hostage by the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters. The boy and the mother were released; however the father was reportedly killed.

Developments and concerns

229. In the light of ongoing violations, the United Nations supported the Government's efforts to strengthen the protection of children in conflict. In particular, the Department of National Defence issued a circular setting out procedures and guidelines for the Armed Forces of the Philippines to prevent grave violations. To further strengthen the protection of children, I encourage the Government to promptly adopt the draft law on children in situations of armed conflict while ensuring its adherence to the highest standards of international law, and to leverage existing child protection mechanisms to provide assistance to victims.

230. Regarding MILF, I commend it for the significant progress in implementing its action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children. In this regard, all 1,869 children identified by MILF as associated with its armed wing underwent formal disengagement in a series of ceremonies, the last of which was held in March 2017. In addition, MILF promulgated a directive requiring regular self-monitoring and screening of armed elements as well as age-assessment guidelines to establish safeguards for the prevention of association and reassociation of children. This significant progress should be replicated by other armed groups, including NDFP/NPA, who held discussion with UNICEF during the reporting period.

Thailand

231. A peace dialogue between the Government and an umbrella organization of armed groups continued in 2016. However, there was ongoing armed violence in southern Thailand, including sporadic clashes between security forces and armed groups, as well as attacks by armed groups on civilian targets.

Grave violations

232. The United Nations received reports of the killing of 5 children and injuries to 27 children resulting from improvised explosive device attacks and shooting, an increase compared with 2015, when 19 child casualties were recorded (4 killed, 15 injured). For example, in April in Songkhla Province, a 4-year old boy was killed in a motorcycle bomb attack allegedly targeting the police.

233. Schools and education personnel continued to be targeted by armed groups, including by the killing of teachers and by arson and improvised explosive device attacks. On 6 September, for example, a motorcycle-borne improvised explosive device was detonated in front of an elementary school, killing 1 four-year-old girl and injuring at least 10 people, including teachers. One attack on a hospital was reported on 13 March, when an unknown armed group stormed the Joh Airong Hospital in Narathiwat Province and used it to attack a nearby government security post. Before leaving, the attackers tied up 1 pregnant nurse and destroyed hospital equipment.

Developments and concerns

234. I welcome the ongoing peace dialogue between the Government and armed groups and encourage all parties involved to include the protection of children and schools in discussions.

IV. Recommendations

235. **I am gravely concerned by the scale and severity of the violations committed against children in 2016, which included alarming levels of killing and maiming of children, recruitment and use of children and, in certain situations, denial of humanitarian access to children, and I call upon parties to conflict, the Security Council and Member States to take immediate action to prevent these violations against children from occurring.**

236. **Ensuring full compliance with international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law by all parties must be the cornerstone of our prevention efforts. In this regard, I welcome the steps taken by a number of Member States to make international commitments to protect children in the context of armed conflict, including through the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the endorsement of the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups and the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups. To further the aim of protecting children in all situations included in the present report, I urge all Member States engaged in operations against violent extremist groups, whether acting alone or as members of coalitions, to make commitments to establish specific safeguards to protect children from violations, including by placing an increased focus on the principles of distinction and proportionality under international humanitarian law.**

237. **I urge Member States, including when countering violent extremism, to treat children allegedly associated with non-State armed groups primarily as victims and to swiftly adopt protocols for their handover to civilian child protection actors in order to prioritize their reintegration. I also encourage the Security Council to highlight the detrimental impact on children that results from widespread screening of civilians in situations of armed conflict.**

238. **I encourage Member States to establish long-term multi-year mechanisms for the reintegration of recruited and used children, including by placing a specific focus on girls and on psychosocial and education programmes and vocational training. Adequate long-term funding is vital to implement and sustain such programmes.**

239. **I welcome national and international efforts to hold perpetrators accountable for crimes against children in situations of armed conflict. Impunity must end in order to break the cycles of violence and aid prevention efforts. Member States should strengthen their support for justice systems by allocating sufficient resources and capacity to the investigation and prosecution of those who perpetrate crimes against children.**

240. **I welcome the leadership and contributions of regional and subregional organizations regarding the protection of children and I call upon them to engage with my Special Representative to continue the integration of child protection considerations into their policies, planning of peace support operations, training of personnel and conduct of operations.**

241. **I urge Member States and regional and subregional organizations involved in negotiating cessation of hostilities or peace agreements to include specific child protection provisions from the outset in order to prioritize the prevention of grave violations.**

242. **I call upon the Security Council to continue to request the deployment of dedicated child protection capacity to United Nations peace operations, in line with newly revised United Nations policy on child protection in United Nations peace operations, in order to mainstream child protection, conduct dialogue on action plans, release and reintegrate children and for monitoring and reporting. The need for such child protection capacity, including the budget required, should be systematically assessed during the preparation of peacekeeping operations and political missions.**

V. Lists contained in the annexes to the present report

243. The modifications in the presentation of the lists contained in the annexes to the present report resulted from additions to the report of dedicated sections to note the developments and concerns in the situations covered. In this regard, both annexes have divided the list into two sections: parties to conflict that have put in place measures to improve the protection of children during the reporting period and parties that have not.

244. In Afghanistan, ISIL-Khorasan Province is listed for the recruitment and use and killing and maiming of children in the light of the number of verified incidents attributed to that party. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Mai-Mai Mazembe has been included in the annexes for the recruitment and use and killing and maiming of children given the number of incidents attributed to that party since its emergence in mid-2016. In Iraq, the popular mobilization forces were responsible for 57 verified cases of recruitment and use during 2016 and that party is listed for that violation. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Army of Islam also recruited and used children in significant numbers and has therefore been listed. All of the above-mentioned parties are included in section A of annex I. In Yemen, the actions of the coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen objectively led to that party being listed for the killing and maiming of children, with 683 child casualties attributed to it, and as a result of that party being responsible for 38 verified incidents, for attacks on schools and hospitals during 2016. The coalition is included

in section B of annex I, as it has put in place measures during the reporting period aimed at improving the protection of children.

245. Other previously listed parties to conflict have had additional violations added based on incidents that occurred in 2016. In this regard, given the levels of abductions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Allied Democratic Forces, the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda and the Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri have been included for that violation. In Nigeria, Boko Haram is listed for rape and other forms of sexual violence in the light of the cases verified as a result of improved access. In the Syrian Arab Republic, government forces and pro-government militias are listed for the recruitment and use of children. In the same country, ISIL is also included for the abduction of children.

246. In terms of delisting, the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo took all necessary steps in its action plan pertaining to the recruitment and use of children and that party has been delisted for that violation; however, it remains listed for rape and other forms of sexual violence against children. In addition, in the Philippines, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front has been delisted for the recruitment and use of children following the completion of its action plan.

247. Other modifications to the list have resulted from changes in the landscape of armed conflict in the respective situations. In this regard, in Afghanistan the name of the Taliban has been amended. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the names of the government forces and the Free Syrian Army have been slightly changed to more accurately reflect the realities on the ground. Similarly, in Yemen, the name of the government forces has also been slightly modified.

Annex I

Pursuant to Security Council resolutions 1379 (2001), 1882 (2009), 1998 (2011) and 2225 (2015), parties that commit grave violations affecting children in situations of armed conflict on the agenda of the Security Council*

A. Listed parties that have not put in place measures during the reporting period to improve the protection of children

Parties in Afghanistan

Non-State actors

1. Haqqani Network[a,b]
2. Hizb-i Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar[a,b]
3. ISIL-Khorasan Province[a,b]
4. Taliban forces and affiliated groups, including the Tora Bora Front, Jama'at al-Da'wah ila al-Qur'an wal-Sunnah and the Latif Mansur Network[a,b,d,e]

Parties in Colombia

Non-State actors

1. Ejército de Liberación Nacional[a]

Parties in the Central African Republic

Non-State actors

1. Former Séléka coalition and associated armed groups[a,b,c,d]
2. Local defence militias known as the anti-balaka[a,b,c]
3. Lord's Resistance Army[a,b,c,e]

Parties in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Non-State actors

1. Allied Democratic Forces[a,b,d,e]
2. Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda[a,c,d,e]
3. Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri[a,c,d,e]
4. Lord's Resistance Army[a,b,c,e]
5. Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain[a]

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* Parties listed in section A have not put in place adequate measures to improve the protection of children during the reporting period; parties listed in section B have put in place measures to improve the protection of children during the reporting period.

[a] Party that recruits and uses children.

[b] Party that kills and maims children.

[c] Party that commits rape and other forms of sexual violence against children.

[d] Party that engages in attacks on schools and/or hospitals.

[e] Party that abducts children.

† Party that has concluded an action plan with the United Nations in line with Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005).

6. Union des patriotes congolais pour la paix (also known as Mai-Mai Lafontaine)[a]
7. Mai-Mai Mazembe[a,b]
8. Mai-Mai Simba[a,c]
9. Mai-Mai Kata Katanga[a]
10. Nduma défense du Congo-Rénové/Mai-Mai Cheka[a,b]
11. Nyatura[a]
12. Raia Mutomboki[a,c]

Parties in Iraq

Non-State actors

1. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant[a,b,c,d,e]
2. Popular mobilization forces[a]

Parties in Mali

Non-State actors

1. Ansar Eddine[a,c]
2. Mouvement pour l'unification et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest[a,c]

Parties in Myanmar

State actors

1. Tatmadaw Army, including integrated border guard forces[a,†]

Non-State actors

1. Democratic Karen Benevolent Army[a]
2. Kachin Independence Army[a]
3. Karen National Liberation Army[a]
4. Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council[a]
5. Karenni Army[a]
6. Shan State Army-South[a]
7. United Wa State Army[a]

Parties in Somalia

Non-State actors

1. Al-Shabaab[a,b,e]
2. Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (ASWJ)[a]

Parties in South Sudan

State actors

1. Sudan People's Liberation Army[a,b,c,e,†]

Non-State actors

1. Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition[a,b]
2. White Army[a]

Parties in the Sudan

Non-State actors

1. Justice and Equality Movement[a,†]
2. Pro-government militias[a]
3. Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid[a]
4. Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minawi[a,†]

Parties in the Syrian Arab Republic

State actors

1. Government forces, including the National Defence Force and pro-government militias[a,b,c,d]

Non-State actors

1. Ahrar al-Sham[a,b]
2. Groups self-affiliated with the Free Syrian Army[a]
3. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant[a,b,c,d,e]
4. Army of Islam[a]
5. Nusrah Front (also known as Jabhat Fath al-Sham)[a,b]
6. People's Protection Units[a]

Parties in Yemen

State actors

1. Government forces, including the Yemeni Armed Forces[a,*]

Non-State actors

1. Houthis/Ansar Allah[a,b,d]
2. Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula/Ansar al-Sharia[a]
3. Pro-government militias, including the Salafists and popular committees[a]

B. Listed parties that have put in place measures during the reporting period aimed at improving the protection of children

Parties in Afghanistan

State actors

1. Afghan National Police, including the Afghan Local Police[a,†]

Parties in Colombia

Non-State actors

1. Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejército del Pueblo[a]

Parties in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

State actors

1. Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo[c,†]

Parties in Mali

Non-State actors

1. Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad[a,c,†]

Parties in Somalia

State actors

1. Somali National Army[a,b,†]

Parties in the Sudan

State actors

1. Government security forces, including the Sudanese Armed Forces, popular defence forces and national police forces[a,†]

Non-State actors

1. Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North[a,†]

Parties in Yemen

State actors

1. Coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen led by Saudi Arabia[b,d]

Annex II

Pursuant to Security Council resolutions 1379 (2001), 1882 (2009), 1998 (2011) and 2225 (2015), parties that commit grave violations affecting children in situations of armed conflict not on the agenda of the Security Council, or in other situations*

A. Listed parties that have not put in place measures during the reporting period to improve the protection of children

Parties in Nigeria

Non-State actors

1. Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad, also known as Boko Haram[a,b,c,d,e]

Parties in the Philippines

Non-State actors

1. Abu Sayyaf Group[a]
2. Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters[a]
3. New People's Army[a]

B. Listed parties that have put in place measures during the reporting period aimed at improving the protection of children

Parties in Nigeria

Non-State actors

1. Civilian Joint Task Force[a,f]

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* Parties listed in section A have not put in place adequate measures to improve the protection of children during the reporting period; parties listed in section B have put in place measures to improve the protection of children during the reporting period.

[a] Party that recruits and uses children.

[b] Party that kills and maims children.

[c] Party that commits rape and other forms of sexual violence against children.

[d] Party that engages in attacks on schools and/or hospitals.

[e] Party that abducts children.

[f] Party that has concluded an action plan with the United Nations in line with Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005).

United Nations A/72/362

General Assembly

Distr.: General
24 August 2017
English
Original: Spanish

Seventy-second session
Item 115 (d) of the provisional agenda*
Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of fifteen members of the Human Rights Council

Letter dated 24 August 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Peru to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to recall that the Government of Peru presented its candidature to the Human Rights Council for the period 2018-2020 at elections to be held during the seventy-second session of the General Assembly.

In that regard, and in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251, the Government of Peru has the honour to transmit herewith the voluntary pledges of Peru reaffirming its commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights and its active participation in the Human Rights Council (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly under item 115 (d) of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) Gustavo **Meza-Cuadra**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* A/72/150.

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Annex to the letter dated 24 August 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Peru to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

[Original: Spanish]

Candidature of Peru for election to the Human Rights Council, 2018-2020

Voluntary pledges and commitments pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251

Peru has an unwavering policy of respecting, promoting and protecting human rights — both civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights — and also fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law, in accordance with the country's Constitution and its obligations under the international instruments to which it is a party. Peru accordingly recognizes that human rights are inherently universal, indivisible and interdependent.

In line with that consistent position, Peru is a party to the main United Nations human rights instruments, including:

- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
- The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Optional Protocol thereto.
- The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.
- The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the three Optional Protocols thereto, including the third Optional Protocol on a communications procedure.
- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In addition, the procedure for the accession of Peru to the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is currently under evaluation.

1. Peru and the universal human rights system

Peru has a policy of strict compliance with its international human rights commitments and remains convinced that the active participation of States in the Human Rights Council and their cooperation with the mechanisms and special procedures used to evaluate their compliance with those obligations are important for the strengthening of the universal human rights system.

(a) Participation of Peru in the Human Rights Council

Peru has been committed to the construction and institutional strengthening of the Human Rights Council since its establishment.[1] It participates actively in the debates of the Council and cooperates with its organs and special procedures, thereby helping the Council to more effectively promote universal respect for and the protection of the fundamental rights of all persons in accordance with legitimacy criteria, without discrimination of any kind and without political selectivity.

In that context, in recent years Peru has submitted Human Rights Council resolutions on equal participation in political and public affairs (30/9), the impact of arms transfers on human rights (32/12), national policies and human rights (30/24) and human rights and the regulation of civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms (29/10). It has also co-sponsored other important resolutions, notably those related to combating all forms of discrimination and to the protection and promotion of the human rights of vulnerable groups.

(b) Cooperation with the mechanisms and special procedures of the universal human rights system

Peru cooperates with the monitoring bodies for the treaties to which it is a party, including through the submission of the relevant national reports and the implementation of the observations and recommendations of the monitoring bodies.

Furthermore, in a demonstration of its positive, committed and transparent approach to ensuring that human rights are respected and protected, Peru volunteered to be one of the first States reviewed under the universal periodic review mechanism. The results of its first periodic review by the Human Rights Council were highly positive. The process gave the Peruvian Government the opportunity to demonstrate the commitments and significant progress made at the national level towards consolidating democracy while also strengthening the exercise and guarantee of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Peru is currently preparing for its next universal periodic review in late 2017. To that end, the various Government sectors are working to put together information on the measures that they have implemented and the progress that has been made with regard to respect for and the promotion of human rights and the fulfilment of their international obligations.

Between 1996 and 1998, Peru was visited by the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. Moreover, in 2002 Peru extended a standing invitation to the special rapporteurs, independent experts and working groups of the former Commission on Human Rights, now the Human Rights Council, to visit, assess and report on the country, in accordance with their mandates.

In that context, Peru has received visits in recent years from the following special procedures mandate holders:

- Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living (2003).
- Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (2004).
- Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants (2004).

[1] Peru was a founding member of the Human Rights Council and was later a member during the period 2011-2014.

- Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination (2007).
- Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples (2009 and 2013).
- Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism (2010).
- Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences (2011).
- Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice (2014).
- Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (2015).

Those visits, and the resulting recommendations, served as the basis for the development and implementation of policies and measures designed to achieve significant progress on the protection and promotion of human rights in Peru. The Government has addressed and followed up on the observations and recommendations issued by each of the mechanisms in the system and has provided information as required on the various topics in question.

As part of the continuation of this national policy, coordination is under way for visits this year by:

- The Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes.
- The Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises.
- The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.

2. Peru and the inter-American human rights system

At the regional level, Peru is committed to regional stability and the strengthening of peace. Peru reiterates its adherence to dialogue as the means for peaceful resolution of disputes. In that connection, Peru supports efforts within the Organization of American States (OAS) to reform the inter-American human rights system in order to strengthen it through dialogue among member States, members of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the judges of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Peru maintains a policy of respecting and complying with the recommendations and decisions of the organs of the inter-American human rights system.

Within OAS, Peru has submitted a number of important resolutions on human rights in recent years, including those relating to access to public information and protection of personal data; persons who have disappeared and assistance to members of their families; and gender equity and balanced geographic and legal-system representation on the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. It has also co-sponsored many other resolutions, notably those aiming to strengthen the promotion and protection of the rights of persons in vulnerable situations.

Furthermore, Peru is seeking and proposing ways to make the organs of the inter-American human rights system financially sustainable and provide them with an adequate budget. It is also examining proposals to resolve the problem of the backlog of petitions and cases before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

3. Progress at the national level

Peru has a national human rights plan — its priority instrument in the field of human rights — that is constantly being updated, and it works continuously to maintain and strengthen the foundations of an independent justice system that respects due process, fights all forms of discrimination, in particular against women, and supports the rights of the child, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities and older persons, among other vulnerable groups.

The National Human Rights Plan 2014-2016 was adopted in 2014, and to date much hard work has been done to draft the National Human Rights Plan 2017-2021, which will seek to establish more ambitious targets and goals on the basis of previous experiences and outcomes.

The new National Human Rights Plan 2017-2021 will focus on guidelines in five basic areas, namely: (i) the promotion of a culture of human rights and peace in Peru; (ii) the design and strengthening of public policies on the promotion and protection of civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights; (iii) the design and implementation of policies in favour of groups that require special protection; (iv) a strengthening of the domestic legal order through the adoption and/or implementation of international instruments for the promotion and protection of human rights; and (v) the implementation of standards for the protection of human rights in the activities of private and public enterprises.

Furthermore, Peru maintains an Office of the Ombudsman, an autonomous constitutional body established under the 1993 Constitution, whose mission is to protect the constitutional and fundamental rights of the individual and the community and to oversee the fulfilment of public administration duties and the provision of high-quality public services to citizens. It operates in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles), which set the nature, scope and areas of action of such institutions.

Given that extreme poverty hampers the full and effective exercise of human rights and weakens democracy and popular participation, the Government of Peru has been implementing social policies to combat poverty. This has been bolstered by the country's significant economic growth, which has made it possible to devote greater efforts to guaranteeing its citizens the full and effective exercise of their fundamental rights. These policies have been translated into concrete and verifiable progress and improvement in indicators in the areas of education, health, child malnutrition, education and basic services, where the targets set for 2015 were broadly achieved, in line with the Millennium Development Goals. Now that those targets have been achieved, progress is continuing towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The country acts in accordance with international law, its Constitution and international human rights instruments. In this context, the Peruvian State has been strengthening efforts to prevent social tension and conflicts and will continue to work with regional organizations and civil society to gain their valuable contributions to human rights issues.

4. Commitments made by Peru to human rights

As testimony to the importance the country attaches to the promotion and protection of human rights, the following commitments made by Peru in that regard, at both the domestic and the international levels, should be noted:

(a) At the domestic level

- To strengthen the implementation of policies on social inclusion, equity and poverty eradication, from a gender perspective, with a view to improving the quality of life and well-being of all citizens, in particular vulnerable individuals.
- To continue striving to ensure the right to health for all citizens.
- To improve the effectiveness of constitutional, administrative and criminal measures adopted with the aim of eliminating all types of discriminatory practice and promoting the formal and substantive equality of persons under the country's jurisdiction, in line with the commitments assumed under relevant international instruments.
- To improve access to justice in Peru by taking measures to guarantee the right to due process for citizens, with a view to, among other things, combating impunity.
- To reaffirm its commitment to the victims of the violent acts of the 1980s and 1990s by continuing to implement symbolic, material, individual and collective reparations programmes as part of the Comprehensive Reparations Plan.
- To improve dialogue with indigenous peoples and scale up efforts to improve their quality of life, focusing on reducing poverty, promoting their development and adequately protecting their living environment.
- To ensure the effective implementation and monitoring of policies to be adopted under the National Human Rights Plan 2017-2021.
- To expand and develop public policy measures aimed at protecting vulnerable population groups and to include other groups that need state intervention to secure their rights, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, domestic workers and human rights defenders.
- To continue to implement policies intended to guarantee equal access to inclusive, high-quality education for all citizens, in particular vulnerable individuals such as persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples, and to eliminate gender disparities at all levels of education.
- To continue to make every effort to combat all forms of discrimination against women and girls, seeking to eliminate all forms of violence against them, including trafficking, sexual exploitation and other types of exploitation, and fostering the effective participation of and equal opportunities for women in political, economic and public life.

(b) At the international level

- To continue participating constructively in the universal periodic review process and responding to the recommendations emerging from this mechanism.
- To continue to promote the strengthening of the Human Rights Council's special procedures and encourage more States to extend standing invitations. Peru serves as an example of this practice, as it has maintained a standing invitation to special procedures mandate holders to visit the country and submit a report in accordance with their mandate.
- To focus its efforts on submitting and supporting resolutions and documents in the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council that deal with important

human rights issues and closely related topics, such as democracy, extreme poverty, combating impunity, and the rights of indigenous peoples, among others.

- To continue to support the strengthening of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and uphold its mandate.
- To continue fostering the promotion and protection of the human rights of all people, especially women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples, and to continue to participate actively in all efforts being carried out at the global or regional levels in this area.
- To strengthen collaboration with the monitoring bodies for the human rights treaties to which Peru is a party, submitting the relevant periodic reports and implementing the recommendations issued by those bodies.
- To continue supporting the work of international judicial bodies, in particular the International Criminal Court, and promoting progress towards universal adherence to the Rome Statute.
- To promote cooperation and the exchange of information between the United Nations human rights system and regional systems.
- To foster international cooperation between States with a view to achieving the targets set under the Sustainable Development Goals.

United Nations A/72/363

General Assembly

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Seventy-second session
Item 101 (e) of the provisional agenda*
Review and implementation of the Concluding Document of the Twelfth Special Session of the General Assembly

Regional confidence-building measures: activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa**

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

During the reporting period, the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa held two ministerial meetings. The forty-third meeting was held in Sao Tome from 28 November to 1 December 2016 and the forty-fourth meeting was held in Yaoundé from 29 May to 2 June 2017. Both meetings were organized by the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), in its capacity as secretariat of the Committee.

During the two meetings, the Committee reviewed the political and security situation in Central Africa and made specific recommendations on actions to be taken to address the prevailing security challenges, which were considered under the agenda of the Committee. During its forty-fourth meeting, the Committee dedicated a session to the regional dimension of the situation in the Central African Republic and adopted a declaration on the issue (see annex I).

The Committee examined the status of the signature and ratification of legal instruments on disarmament and the non-proliferation of arms in the subregion, in particular the Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and All Parts and Components That Can Be Used for Their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly (Kinshasa Convention) and the Arms Trade Treaty. It welcomed the entry into force of the Kinshasa Convention on 8 March 2017 and urged those Member States that had not yet done so to ratify or accede to both instruments.

* A/72/150.

** Due to technical processing issues, the present report has been submitted after the 10 week deadline.

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The Committee assessed progress achieved in the implementation of the regional strategy and plan of action for combating terrorism and the trafficking in small arms and light weapons in Central Africa, which had been adopted at its forty-first meeting. The Committee recommended that the relevant peace and security organs of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) endorse the strategy to enable its secretariat to follow up on implementation, which remained the responsibility of member States.

The threat posed by Boko Haram, as well as the measures being taken at the regional level to counter the group, in particular the operationalization of the Multinational Joint Task Force and the long-planned joint summit of ECCAS and the Economic Community of West African States, remained high on the agenda of the Committee. In this regard, the Bureau of the Committee undertook a field visit to Cameroon and Chad from 31 October to 3 November 2016.

The Committee paid increased attention to the issue of women and peace and security, in particular in relation to the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and the participation of women in decision-making. At its forty-third meeting, the Committee adopted a declaration calling upon its member States to increase the representation of women in delegations attending its biannual meetings (see annex II).

At the same meeting, the Committee decided to commission an evaluation of its work after 25 years of existence. An independent evaluation was carried out in close consultation with the States members of the Committee and with all relevant partners. The findings of the evaluation were presented at the forty-fourth meeting and, as a result, a declaration was adopted on the revitalization of the work of the Committee, in particular its working methods and relations with the relevant peace and security organs of ECCAS (see annex III).

The forty-fifth meeting is scheduled to be held in Kigali before the end of 2017.

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 71/79, entitled "Regional confidence-building measures: activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa", the General Assembly welcomed the efforts of the Committee towards addressing cross-border security threats in Central Africa. The Assembly reaffirmed its support for efforts aimed at promoting confidence-building measures at the regional and subregional levels in order to ease tensions and conflicts in Central Africa and to further sustainable peace, stability and development in the subregion.

2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly also expressed its satisfaction to the Secretary-General for his support to the Committee, expressed appreciation for the role played by the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), in its capacity as secretariat of the Committee, and strongly encouraged the States members of the Committee and international partners to support the work of the Office. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide the assistance needed by the Committee to ensure the success of its regular biannual meetings. It also called upon him to submit to the Assembly, at its seventy-second session, a report on the implementation of resolution 71/79.

3. The present report is submitted pursuant to the above request and covers the activities carried out by the Committee from September 2016 to August 2017.

II. Activities of the Committee

4. The forty-third meeting of the Committee was held in Sao Tome, from 28 November to 1 December 2016, and the forty-fourth meeting was held in Yaoundé, from 29 May to 2 June 2017. Both meetings were attended by Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Sao Tome and Principe. Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were unable to attend the forty-third meeting, while Rwanda was unable to attend the forty-fourth meeting.

5. The following entities also participated as observers in one or both meetings: the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Lake Chad Basin Commission; the Multinational Joint Task Force, the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa. During the forty-third meeting, the Committee requested that the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) attend its meetings and give briefings on their activities and on the regional dimension in their areas of operation. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) were invited to attend the forty-fourth meeting, as was the International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF), which was granted observer status.

6. The main issues on the agenda of the Committee and its activities during the period under review are set out below.

A. Review of the geopolitical and security situation in Central Africa

7. The Committee continued to serve as a forum for developing a shared understanding of the peace and security challenges in Central Africa and collective approaches for addressing them. In particular, the Committee examined relevant developments within each country, while also reviewing the principal peace and security challenges across the subregion.

8. The Committee noted that its member States continued to face uncertain democratic and electoral processes, social tensions in the context of a heavy dependency on commodities and a slowdown of the world economy, and impediments to the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law. Those challenges were compounded by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, transnational organized crime and the activities of armed and terrorists groups at the regional level, as well as by the persistence of instability and conflicts around the subregion with serious human rights and humanitarian consequences, including 1.4 million refugees and 2.5 million internally displaced persons across Central Africa. In this regard, the Committee took note with concern of the security crisis in the Central African Republic and parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and tensions between Burundi and Rwanda, as well as in the Pool region in the Congo and the North-West and South-West regions in Cameroon. During the forty-fourth meeting, some member States also raised concerns about the issue of alternation of power in the subregion and suggested that a thematic debate on peaceful and democratic alternation of power be held at the following meeting of the Committee.

9. As requested by the Executive Committee of the Secretary-General on 16 March 2017, the secretariat of the Standing Advisory Committee dedicated a session of its forty-fourth meeting to the regional dimension of the situation in the Central African Republic. The representatives of the Government of the Central African Republic, the ECCAS secretariat, the African Union Commission and MINUSCA gave presentations on the various challenges to peace and security. FAO also raised the issue of transhumance and its security implications. The Committee subsequently adopted a ministerial declaration in which, inter alia, it condemned the attacks against civilians, humanitarian workers and peacekeepers; called for the harmonization of peace and reconciliation initiatives, while committing to the fight against impunity; and called upon the Security Council to mandate MINUSCA to support the defence and security forces of the Central African Republic in their efforts to stabilize the country.

B. Disarmament and arms control

1. Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and All Parts and Components That Can Be Used for Their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly and the Arms Trade Treaty

10. The Committee examined the status of the signature and ratification of legal instruments on disarmament and non-proliferation of arms in the subregion, in particular the Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and All Parts and Components That Can Be Used for Their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly (Kinshasa Convention) (see A/65/517-S/2010/534, annex), which was negotiated by States members of the Committee, and the Arms Trade Treaty (see resolution 67/234 B). It welcomed the entry into force of the Kinshasa Convention on 8 March 2017 and urged those member States that had not yet done so to ratify or accede to those instruments. To date, Burundi,

the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Rwanda have yet to ratify the Kinshasa Convention. Article 34, paragraph 3, of the Convention provides for the convening of the first Conference of States Parties to the Convention one year after its entry into force. In terms of the Arms Trade Treaty, the Central African Republic and Chad are States parties to the Treaty, while Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Congo, Gabon, Rwanda, and Sao Tome and Principe are signatories.

2. Update on the activities of the Office for Disarmament Affairs

11. The United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, which is part of the Office for Disarmament Affairs, continued to be an important partner of the Committee on disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation issues. The representative of the Regional Centre gave a briefing on relevant disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation activities in support of the States members of the Committee. The activities focused in particular on technical assistance and capacity-building to prevent the trafficking in small arms and light weapons through improved physical security and stockpile management, including of ammunition. In addition, the Regional Centre provided training and technical assistance to the States of the Lake Chad Basin region on securing small arms, light weapons and ammunition, with a view to preventing their diversion to non-State armed groups. The Regional Centre also provided support to French-speaking countries by drafting a disarmament guide in French with the support of OIF.

C. Armed violence and terrorism in Central Africa

1. Regional strategy and plan of action for combating terrorism and the trafficking in small arms and light weapons in Central Africa

12. Following extensive consultations between the States members of the Committee, the ECCAS secretariat and UNOCA, the Committee reiterated at its forty-fourth meeting that the coordination of and follow-up to the implementation of the regional strategy and plan of action for combating terrorism and the trafficking in small arms and light weapons in Central Africa, which had been developed within the framework of the Committee and adopted at its forty-first meeting, in Libreville in November 2015, would be placed under the responsibility of the ECCAS secretariat. The Committee also called upon the ECCAS peace and security organs, notably the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa, to endorse the strategy officially, and upon its member States to take ownership of the strategy.

2. Boko Haram

13. During the forty-third and forty-fourth meetings of the Committee, representatives of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Multinational Joint Task Force provided extensive briefings on the activities of Boko Haram and the measures taken to counter them. It was noted that the operations of the Task Force had successfully degraded Boko Haram's capability to hold territory and conduct large-scale attacks. At the same time, Boko Haram remained a serious regional threat and retained the capacity to carry out attacks against military and civilian targets, in particular through suicide bombings and the use of improvised explosive devices. The representative of the Lake Chad Basin Commission highlighted the issue of defectors and of persons who were captured from Boko Haram, as well as the need for a coordinated and comprehensive response to tackle their disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration. The representative of the Multinational Joint Task Force stressed the instrumental nature of cooperation with the local population, in particular vigilante committees, and of the intelligence contributions from international partners. He also stressed the challenges and gaps

that the Task Force continued to face regarding mobility, logistics and demining, as well as the need for amphibious capacity and night-viewing goggles.

14. The Bureau of the Committee undertook a visit to Cameroon and Chad from 31 October to 3 November 2016. The aim of the visit was to: express regional solidarity; raise awareness among States members of ECCAS about the needs of Cameroon and Chad to better counter Boko Haram; raise awareness among those States about the issue of terrorism and the need to adopt a holistic approach; and stress the importance of the operationalization of the Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea In Yaoundé, the delegation met with the Deputy Foreign Minister in Charge of Relations with the Islamic World, as well as with senior officials in charge of technical cooperation at the Ministry of Defence. In N'Djamena, the delegation met with the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Integration and International Cooperation and the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Public Security and Immigration. The delegation also visited the headquarters of the Multinational Joint Task Force in N'Djamena, the Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea in Yaoundé and the town of Kousséri, Cameroon, which sits on the border with Chad.

15. During the forty-fourth meeting, the representative of UNOCA briefed the Committee on the visit of the Security Council to countries affected by Boko Haram, in March 2017, and the subsequent adoption of Security Council resolution 2349 (2017) in relation to peace and security in Africa.

16. The Committee reiterated its call to its member States and the ECCAS secretariat to intensify their efforts to hold the long-planned joint summit of ECCAS and ECOWAS on Boko Haram, as requested by the ECCAS Heads of State and Government in February 2015.

3. Lord's Resistance Army

17. The Committee expressed concern about the withdrawal of the Uganda People's Defence Forces from the African Union Regional Task Force combatting the Lord's Resistance Army in the eastern part of the Central African Republic, as well as the end of the mandate of the United States Special Forces supporting them. The Committee noted that the withdrawals would likely result in a security vacuum exploitable by the Lord's Resistance Army and other armed groups. While significantly diminished, the Lord's Resistance Army retained the capacity to harm civilians in remote areas in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

D. Poaching and transnational organized crime

18. The Committee reviewed developments regarding poaching and transnational organized crime, including in relation to illegal trade in wildlife and trafficking in persons and drugs. UNODC reported that little progress had been made in dismantling criminal networks, which exploit differences and loopholes in national legal frameworks, institutional weaknesses, corruption, the limitations of criminal justice systems and porous borders. With regard to poaching, the ECCAS secretariat informed the Committee of its intention to organize in the near future a conference in N'Djamena on eco-security and the management of the human-fauna conflict.

19. With regard to drug trafficking, UNODC briefed the Committee on the effectiveness of the Airport Communication Programme, a multi-agency, anti-trafficking initiative aimed at strengthening the detection, interdiction and

investigative capacities of participating airports in illicit drug source and transit countries. To date, the Programme has been set up in Cameroon.

E. Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

20. During its forty-third and forty-fourth meetings, the Committee discussed progress made in the implementation of the recommendations adopted at the Summit of Heads of State and Government on Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea, held in Yaoundé on 24 and 25 June 2013, in particular the operationalization of the Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea and the Regional Centre for Maritime Security in Central Africa, located in Pointe-Noire, Congo. On 22 February 2017, the ECCAS Secretary-General, the President of the ECOWAS Commission and the Executive Secretary of the Gulf of Guinea Commission appointed the statutory managers of the Centre. The full operationalization of the Interregional Coordination Centre is scheduled for September 2017, three years after its inauguration. Its workplan for the period from 2017 to 2021 includes capacity-building for stakeholders in the maritime sector, the exchange of information and the provision of assistance with the demarcation and delimitation of maritime boundaries. While the Interregional Coordination Centre and its parent organizations intend to mobilize resources from international partners, the Committee commended Cameroon and the Congo for their support to the Interregional Coordination Centre and the Regional Centre for Maritime Security in Central Africa, respectively, and called upon its member States to honour their financial commitments to enable the predictable and sustainable functioning of both Centres.

F. Implementation of the women, peace and security agenda in Central Africa

21. During the reporting period, the Committee increased its focus on the issue of women and peace and security, in particular in relation to the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and the participation of women in decision-making.

22. The representative of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) reported that women were the main victims of conflicts and violence in Central Africa, making up a significant proportion of refugees, internally displaced persons and victims of sexual violence. Women remained underrepresented in decision-making processes, bodies and high-level functions, including peace and electoral processes, parliaments and ministerial positions, as well as in the security sector. At the time of reporting, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda had developed national action plans for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), and Cameroon was at an advanced stage of doing so.

23. At its forty-third meeting, the Committee adopted a declaration calling upon its member States to increase the representation of women in their delegations attending its meetings. At its forty-fourth meeting, the States members of the Committee further called for increased engagement with UN-Women in the subregion.

G. Cooperation with international and regional organizations, with the support of United Nations entities

24. Through their active participation and contributions, the ECCAS secretariat, the African Union Commission and various United Nations entities, including MINUSCA, MONUSCO, the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa, UNODC, the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, and UN-Women, continued to provide invaluable assistance to the efforts of the Committee to address peace and security challenges in Central Africa.

25. Regarding the institutional development of ECCAS in relation to peace and security issues, the Committee was informed about the ECCAS institutional reform launched at the sixteenth ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, held in N'Djamena in May 2015. The reform had been placed under the authority of the Chair of the Assembly, President Ali Bongo Ondimba of Gabon, with the support of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, La Francophonie and Regional Integration and in charge of Gabonese people living abroad. One of the key objectives was to modernize and strengthen the ECCAS secretariat and give it a greater political role, with a strengthened conflict prevention mandate. The seventh extraordinary session of the Council of Ministers of ECCAS took place in Libreville, from 25 to 27 April 2017. A budget of 1.9 billion CFA francs (approximately $3.37 million) had been allocated to the reform, which was expected to be carried out from May 2017 to August 2018. The aim of the institutional reform, which was complemented by a broader reform led by Cameroon, was to merge the Central African Economic and Monetary Community and the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries into ECCAS.

H. Evaluation of the Committee

26. At its forty-third meeting, the Committee decided to commission an evaluation of its work with a view to enhancing its relevance and effectiveness after 25 years of existence. In response to the request, and following the approval of the terms of reference for the evaluation by the President of the Committee, UNOCA, together with the Department of Political Affairs, recruited an independent expert to carry out the evaluation.

27. The evaluation process was based on an inclusive approach that included frequent consultations with States members of the Committee, including national focal points and permanent representatives of States members of the Committee to the United Nations in New York, as well as observers, in particular the ECCAS secretariat. A workshop was held in Libreville on 27 and 28 April 2017 to validate the preliminary findings and recommendations and the final report was presented at the forty-fourth meeting of the Committee.

28. The evaluation of the work of the Committee confirmed the continued support for and trust in the mechanism. While the Committee decided that its mandate and substantive focus remained valid, it requested that the agenda of its statutory meetings be more dynamic and attuned to peace and security developments. The Committee noted the need to continue to pay particular attention to disarmament and arms control. Accordingly, subject to the availability of resources in the trust fund of the Committee, it agreed to conduct two activities per year, one dedicated to disarmament and another dedicated to pressing peace and security issues.

29. The Committee decided to maintain the frequency and format of its statutory meetings. In order to enhance ministerial-level attendance, the Committee agreed to

hold closed ministerial meetings on specific issues. The Committee also agreed to institutionalize the national focal point function to improve the implementation of recommendations by relevant national authorities. Moreover, during the evaluation, States members of the Committee stressed the importance of developing a communications strategy for the Committee. UNOCA, in its capacity as secretariat of the Committee, was tasked to work on such a strategy and present it at the forty-fifth meeting of the Committee.

30. The Committee encouraged greater collaboration and synergy with ECCAS, in particular its peace and security organs, such as the Defence and Security Commission of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa, including on the implementation of the regional strategy and plan of action for combating terrorism and the trafficking in small arms and light weapons in Central Africa. It also called for increased cooperation between the secretariat of the Committee and the ECCAS secretariat.

31. The Committee adopted a declaration on its own revitalization (see annex III) and requested Cameroon to provide a briefing on its implementation at its forty-fifth meeting.

III. Administrative and financial matters

32. The Committee recalled the Declaration on the trust fund of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa of 2009 (Libreville Declaration) (see A/64/85-S/2009/288, annex), adopted at its twenty-eighth meeting, and reviewed the financial status of the trust fund. The Committee expressed deep concern about the lack of voluntary contributions and urged its member States to fulfil their financial commitments, in keeping with the spirit of the Libreville Declaration and the Bangui Declaration (A/71/293, annex V). The member States committed to increasing their efforts to contribute to the trust fund and requested a balance of the contributions to date per country. UNOCA provided the requested information in the final report of the forty-fourth ministerial meeting. In response to the call, Angola, the Central African Republic, Gabon and Rwanda made contributions. As at 27 July, the balance of the trust fund stood at $142,226. It should be recalled that, during its forty-second meeting, the Committee had adopted the Bangui Declaration regarding the question of instituting a binding annual contribution of $10,000 per member State, appealing to the Heads of State and Government of the member States to issue a decision to that effect.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

33. The Secretary-General welcomes the Committee's continuing efforts to consolidate peace and security in Central Africa, in collaboration with subregional organizations, in particular ECCAS, and with the African Union, the United Nations system and other international partners.

34. While diminished, Boko Haram remains a serious threat to peace and security for States in the Lake Chad Basin region, including Cameroon and Chad, with significant humanitarian, human rights and security consequences. The recent spate of suicide bombings in Cameroon and Nigeria is a stark reminder that Boko Haram is resilient and will not be defeated without a holistic approach that goes beyond security and includes socioeconomic development, good governance and the protection of human rights. In this context, the Secretary-General commends the Multinational Joint Task Force and the armed forces of the States concerned for their achievements, while also urging them to conduct their operations in strict

compliance with international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law. He calls upon the international community to support the States and communities of the Lake Chad Basin region in their efforts to confront the threat posed by Boko Haram and recover from its scourge, including through managing the increasing flow of surrendering and defecting fighters and dependents. The Secretary-General strongly encourages ECCAS and ECOWAS to hold the planned joint summit of Heads of State on Boko Haram as soon as possible.

35. The Secretary-General calls upon the States members of the Committee to take ownership of the regional strategy and plan of action for combating terrorism and the trafficking in small arms and light weapons in Central Africa, which are a valuable tool developed through the Committee to address armed violence and terrorism. He looks forward to the endorsement of the strategy by the peace and security organs of ECCAS and to its follow-up by the ECCAS secretariat with the support of the United Nations, including UNOCA.

36. The Secretary-General welcomes the entry into force of the Kinshasa Convention, which is an important step forward in the fight against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and the spread of armed violence in Central Africa. The Convention, alongside other African subregional instruments on small arms, creates a mutually reinforcing disarmament and arms control network across the continent and contributes to the implementation of aspiration 4 of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. He calls upon the four States members of the Committee that have not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Convention. Similarly, he calls upon the States members of the Committee that have not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Arms Trade Treaty.

37. The Secretary-General is concerned about continued violence perpetrated by armed groups in the Central African Republic. He welcomes ongoing peace and reconciliation initiatives that are aimed at finding a durable solution to the protracted crisis facing the country. He calls upon all stakeholders to work closely together to that end. In that regard, his Special Representative for Central Africa and Head of UNOCA, in close collaboration with his Special Representative for the Central African Republic and Head of MINUSCA, will continue to advocate for the provision of support by Member States of the region, which, in the declaration adopted in Yaoundé (annex I), have pledged to support the stabilization and recovery of the Central African Republic.

38. In this context, the Secretary-General is also concerned about the likely security vacuum resulting from the withdrawal of the forces deployed to combat the Lord's Resistance Army, in particular in the eastern part of the Central African Republic. He encourages concerned States to adjust existing arrangements to ensure that the Lord's Resistance Army does not exploit such a vacuum.

39. The Secretary-General welcomes the progressive operationalization of the Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea and encourages the States members of the Committee, ECCAS, ECOWAS and the Gulf of Guinea Commission to remain committed to implementing fully the recommendations adopted at the Summit of Heads of State and Government on Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea. He reiterates his call to Member States and partners to provide the resources necessary to ensure the full and sustainable operationalization of the Interregional Coordination Centre and the Regional Centre for Maritime Security in Central Africa. In this regard, UNOCA, in collaboration with UNOWAS, will continue to assist organizations in both subregions.

40. The Secretary-General remains concerned by the continued reports of poaching and illegal trade in wildlife and their links to the financing of armed

groups in Central Africa. He recognizes the Committee's active engagement on the issue, commends its member States for the measures taken to counter the problem and encourages them to take active steps to implement the Libreville Declaration on combating poaching in Central Africa adopted by the Committee (A/71/293, annex IV), calling for greater synergies and cooperation on the issue.

41. The Secretary-General welcomes the adoption in Yaoundé of the declaration on the revitalization of the activities of the Committee (annex III). He believes that implementing the measures that have been adopted will greatly assist in making the Committee more relevant and effective. In particular, he encourages the Committee and ECCAS to strengthen their cooperation and enhance synergies to address subregional challenges in a complementary and consistent manner. He also encourages the States members of the Committee to redouble their efforts to implement the declaration adopted in Sao Tome, at its forty-third meeting, in which it calls for increased women's participation in the delegations of Member States (annex II).

42. The Committee urgently needs additional funding to continue its work. The Secretary-General therefore urges all States members of the Committee to fulfil their financial commitments, in line with the Libreville Declaration of 2009, highlighting the need for them to contribute regularly to the Committee trust fund, so that the Committee may continue to carry out its activities and serve as an essential confidence-building mechanism among the States in the subregion.

43. The Secretary-General is grateful for the support provided by the Department of Political Affairs, UNOCA and his Special Representative for Central Africa and head of UNOCA, François Louncény Fall, for the functioning of the Committee. He also thanks FAO, MINUSCA, MONUSCO, UNODC, the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa for their participation in the meetings of the Committee. He looks forward to the conclusions of the Committee emanating from its forty-fifth and forty-sixth meetings, to be held in Rwanda and the Congo, respectively.

Annex I

[Original: French]

Yaoundé declaration on the situation in the Central African Republic

We, the ministers and heads of delegation of the States members of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, gathered in Yaoundé on the occasion of the forty-fourth ministerial meeting of the Committee,

Recalling the Bangui Declaration on the Central African Republic adopted at the forty-second meeting of the Committee on 10 June 2016,

Recalling also the many long-standing efforts and resolutions of the executive bodies of the United Nations, the African Union and the Economic Community of Central African States aimed at resolving the political and security crisis in the Central African Republic,

Guided by the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Constitutive Act of the African Union, and by a subregional vision grounded in solidarity among States members and respect for fundamental rights,

Reaffirming our strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Central African Republic, and recalling the importance of the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of a member State,

Seriously concerned about the fragile security situation in the Central African Republic caused by the continued presence of armed and criminal groups, which have links to such activities as poaching and transhumance,

Deeply concerned that the illicit trafficking, trade and exploitation of natural resources, including gold, diamonds and wild flora and fauna, are having a negative impact on the economies and development of all States in the subregion and continue to threaten peace and stability,

Reiterating our concern about activities linked to transnational crime in the subregion, which is at risk of becoming a breeding ground for mercenaries fomenting instability and violent extremism in the Central African Republic,

Taking note of the severity of the crisis in the Central African Republic, and expressing our strong determination to implement our joint decisions through bilateral and regional mechanisms in order to support and assist the Central African Republic in the areas of national reconciliation, security sector reform and post-conflict recovery,

1. *Strongly condemn* the acts of violence and violations of fundamental rights, which target in particular women, children and other vulnerable persons;

2. *Strongly condemn also* the attacks by armed groups against the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, humanitarian workers and the national defence and security forces;

3. *Encourage* international organizations and their technical and financial partners in their actions to promote peacebuilding and security in the Central African Republic, including the protection of the constitutional legality regained at great cost with the support of the international community;

4. *Express* our determination to harness our cooperation and solidarity in the service of democracy, respect for fundamental rights, the strengthening of the rule of law, State institutional capacity-building and conflict prevention;

5. *Invite* the members of the Bureau of the International Support Group on the Central African Republic and other regularly involved partners to work closely together, in order to harmonize peace and reconciliation initiatives;

6. *Decide* to combat impunity more effectively by strengthening our judicial systems and harmonizing the prosecutorial rules of our States;

7. *Request* member States to unite their efforts to manage transhumance corridors that can facilitate the circulation of the small arms and light weapons, which is a source of insecurity in the subregion;

8. *Invite* the international community to strengthen the application of restrictions on the trade in natural resources from conflict zones, including through the Kimberley Process;

9. *Recommend* that States members of the Economic Community of Central African States, the Central African Economic and Monetary Community and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, and the international community as a whole, make a greater effort to have the Security Council ease the arms embargo in order to enable the equipping and rearmament of the national defence and security forces, with a view to the restoration of State authority throughout the national territory of the Central African Republic;

10. *Strongly urge* the Security Council to give the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic a mandate to support and assist the Central African defence and security forces in their stabilization efforts, in particular in the east of the country in the context of the withdrawal of the United States and Ugandan forces combating the Lord's Resistance Army;

11. *Decide* to remain seized of the situation in the Central African Republic.

DONE at Yaoundé on 2 June 2017

Annex II

[Original: French]

Sao Tome declaration on the participation of women in the statutory meetings of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

We, the ministers and heads of delegation of the States members of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, gathered in Sao Tome from 28 November to 1 December 2016,

Recalling our commitment to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) of 31 October 2000, which reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution,

Recognizing the efforts made by States members of the Committee to improve the representation of women at the political level,

Taking into consideration the low representation of women in the delegations of the States members of the Committee,

Conscious of the need to promote the participation of women in all discussion, consultation and decision-making forums,

Conscious also that women are among the victims most affected by conflict situations,

Recognizing the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts in the subregion,

1. *Invite* member States to increase the representation of women in delegations participating in the statutory meetings of the Committee;

2. *Decide* to evaluate the situation regularly at meetings of the Committee.

DONE at Sao Tome on 1 December 2016

Annex III

[Original: French]

Yaoundé declaration on the revitalization of the activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

We, the ministers and heads of delegation of the States members of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, gathered in Yaoundé on the occasion of the forty-fourth ministerial meeting of the Committee,

Recalling the final document adopted at Yaoundé on 21 June 1991 by the States members of the Economic Community of Central African States, concerning confidence-building measures, security, disarmament and development in the subregion,[1]

Recalling General Assembly resolution 46/37 B of 6 December 1991, which led to the establishment of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa,

Taking into consideration the importance of the confidence-building measures and their contribution to regional disarmament and international security, in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations,

Noting with satisfaction the significant institutional achievements of the Committee with regard to the promotion of disarmament at the regional and subregional levels, efforts to combat the circulation of weapons, and the economic and social development of the Central African subregion,

Reaffirming the importance and relevance of the Committee as an instrument of preventive diplomacy in the subregional architecture for the promotion of peace and security in Central Africa,

Welcoming the efforts of the United Nations and its assistance with the establishment and operation of the Committee,

Taking into account the recommendations of the report on the evaluation of the Committee commissioned at its forty-third ministerial meeting,

Wishing to enhance the contribution of the Committee to the achievement of the objectives of peace, security and development in the subregion,

1. *Instruct* our Committee focal points and permanent missions to the United Nations in New York to take a much more dynamic approach to the drawing up of the agendas for statutory meetings and to improve the focus of the topics addressed, in order to facilitate the formulation of specific and operational recommendations;

2. *Institutionalize* the role of Committee focal point and encourage frequent coordination among the focal points, in particular with regard to follow-up on the recommendations concerning the competent national institutions;

3. *Establish* a standing agenda item for statutory meetings under which each State shall provide an update on the progress it has made towards the implementation of the recommendations;

[1] A/46/307-S/22805, annex.

4. *Approve* the introduction of closed ministerial meetings in parallel with statutory meetings;

5. *Call for* regular contributions to the Trust Fund;

6. *Encourage* the development of collaboration and synergies between the Committee and the Economic Community of Central African States through consultation between their respective secretariats and interaction between the Committee and the organs of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa, in particular the Commission for Defence and Security, including with a view to promoting the implementation of the regional strategy for combating terrorism and the trafficking in small arms and light weapons in Central Africa adopted by the Committee;

7. *Call for* the organization of an activity related to the topic of disarmament during the first half of every year and an activity concerning the current geopolitical context during the second half of every year, in order to help establish an identity for the Committee, provided that there are sufficient resources in the Trust Fund;

8. *Invite* the secretariat of the Committee, in cooperation with civil society, to develop a communications strategy in order to increase the visibility of the Committee, including among the populations of the subregion;

9. *Endorse* the principle of having the work and activities of the Committee evaluated regularly, with a view to enhancing the Committee's effectiveness and its contribution to peace and security in Central Africa;

10. *Decide* to remain seized of the matter and request Cameroon to provide an update on the situation at the forty-fifth ministerial meeting of Committee.

DONE at Yaoundé on 2 June 2017

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Seventy-second session
Item 134 (u) of the provisional agenda*
Financial reports and audited financial statements, and reports of the Board of Auditors: United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund

Implementation of the recommendations of the Board of Auditors contained in its report for the year ended 31 December 2016 on the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund

Report of the Secretary of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/216 B, in which the Assembly requested the executive heads of the United Nations entities to report to the Assembly, at the same time as the recommendations of the Board of Auditors were submitted to the Assembly, on measures taken or to be taken to implement those recommendations.

The report provides information further to the comments already submitted to the Board of Auditors, which were included in the Board's final report on the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund.

Therefore, in an effort to reduce redundancy and streamline documentation, the present report provides additional comments of the Fund only where required, as well as information on the status of implementation, the department responsible, the estimated completion date and the priority of each recommendation contained in the reports of the Board. In addition, the report provides an update on the status of implementation of the Board's recommendations relating to prior periods that the Board considered not to have been fully implemented.

* A/72/150.

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Introduction

1. The present report is submitted in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 7 of General Assembly resolution 48/216 B, in which the Assembly requested the executive heads of the United Nations entities, at the same time as the recommendations of the Board of Auditors were submitted to the Assembly, through the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, to provide the Assembly with their responses and to indicate the measures that would be taken to implement those recommendations, with appropriate timetables.

2. In preparing the present report, account was taken of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 70/238 A, in which the Assembly, in paragraph 14, stressed that the report of the Board of Auditors on the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund should be submitted separately to the General Assembly, as is the case with other United Nations entities, and decided that a copy should continue to be annexed to the report of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board. In paragraph 5 of its resolution 71/261 A, the Assembly decided to consider further the report of the Board of Auditors on the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund under the agenda item relating to the report of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund.

A. Implementation of the recommendations contained in the report of the Board of Auditors on the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund for the year ended 31 December 2016[1]

3. The status of implementation of the main recommendations as at August 2017 is summarized in table 1.

Table 1
Status of implementation of main recommendations

Department responsible	*Number of recommendations*	*Implemented*	*In progress*	*Target date set*	*No target date*
Investment Management Division	3	–	3	3	–
Fund secretariat	4	–	4	4	–
Total	7	–	7	7	–
Percentage	**100**	–	**100**		

4. The status of implementation of all recommendations as at August 2017 is summarized in table 2.

[1] A/72/5/Add.16.

Table 2
Status of implementation of all recommendations*

Department responsible	*Number of recommendations*	*Implemented*	*In progress*	*Target date set*	*No target date*
Investment Management Division	10	–	10	10	–
Fund secretariat	8	–	8	8	–
Total	**18**	**–**	**18**	**18**	**–**
Percentage	**100**	**–**	**100**		

* In addition, the report of the Board contains, in paragraphs 105 and 106, two audit recommendations addressed to United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund member organizations.

5. **In paragraph 19, the Board recommended that the Fund strengthen its internal control procedure to ensure the accuracy of data before sending them for the actuarial valuation and carry out a fresh actuarial valuation as at 31 December 2017.**

Department responsible: Pension Fund secretariat

Status: In progress

Priority: High

Target date: Third quarter of 2018

6. The Fund will review and improve the processes for the submission of census data for the next actuarial valuation as of 31 December 2017. This valuation will be noted in the financial statements for the year ending 31 December 2017.

7. **In paragraph 30, the Board recommended that the Fund make an appropriate disclosure of the accounting treatment of the tax withholding in the notes to financial statements.**

Department responsible: Investment Management Division

Status: In progress

Priority: Medium

Target date: Second quarter of 2018

8. The Fund will review its policy and the disclosure of the accounting treatment of the tax withholding in the notes to the financial statements.

9. **In paragraph 32, the Board recommended that the Fund prepare and follow a consistent accounting policy for creating provisions for the receivables for the tax withholdings.**

Department responsible: Investment Management Division

Status: In progress

Priority: Medium

Target date: Second quarter of 2018

10. The Fund will review its policy with respect to the measurement of receivables for tax withholdings. It should be noted that the Fund applies individual judgment to estimate the recoverability of each tax receivable for each jurisdiction as required by International Public Sector Accounting Standard (IPSAS) 29, paragraphs 67 and 68. The Fund is of the view that setting up provisions for recoverability of tax receivables solely based on ageing is not consistent with IPSAS.

11. **In paragraph 41, the Board recommended that the Fund prepare a detailed risk budget for all categories of the assets.**

Department responsible:	Investment Management Division
Status:	In progress
Priority:	High
Target date:	Second quarter of 2019

12. The Investment Management Division adopted more detailed risk limits in early 2017 for the internally managed fixed income portfolio, including currency and duration limits. The Division is also in the process of developing active limits for the global equity portfolio, which are expected to be implemented by or before the fourth quarter of 2018. In this regard, the Division is taking action regarding the recommendation to prepare a detailed risk budget for public asset classes such as equities and fixed income. This may not be feasible for categories such as real assets, alternative investments and cash and cash equivalents. The Investment Management Division will review and consider the recommendation as it relates to these asset classes, pending the outcome of further research and analysis.

13. **In paragraph 43, the Board reiterated its earlier recommendation that the Fund fill the vacancies at the Professional and decision-making levels and prepare a comprehensive succession plan to effectively deal with the changes that would occur when senior positions became vacant.**

Department responsible:	Investment Management Division
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Second quarter of 2018

14. The Investment Management Division developed and implemented a succession plan in December 2016. The Division has filled all of its senior-level vacancies and on-boarding is expected to be completed by the end of 2017. Good progress is being made towards filling the remaining vacancies, with the expectation that the vacancy rate will be less than 10 per cent on an ongoing basis by or before the second quarter of 2018.

15. **In paragraph 50, the Board recommended that the Fund review its internal investment and risk processes and procedures so as to outperform the benchmarks and achieve at least the targeted long-term real rate of return of 3.5 per cent.**

Department responsible:	Investment Management Division
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Second quarter of 2018

16. The Investment Management Division reviews its internal investment and risk processes, practices and procedures on an ongoing basis with the intent of meeting or exceeding the benchmarks and the targeted real rate of return of 3.5 per cent over the long term. In 2015, the Fund's strategic asset allocation was updated following the completion of an asset liability management study. The strategic asset allocation target weightings for each asset class are intended to optimize the likelihood that the Fund will achieve its 3.5 per cent real rate of return target over the long term. In 2016 and 2017, the Division developed several new reports for this purpose and work in this area will continue on an ongoing basis.

17. **In paragraph 55, the Board recommended that the Fund continuously monitor and review its fixed income strategy so as to ensure that it would meet and perform better than the benchmark.**

Department responsible:	Investment Management Division
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Second quarter of 2018

18. The Investment Management Division is continuously monitoring and reviewing its fixed income strategy with the intent of meeting or exceeding the benchmark. The Division recently adopted new limits for currency and duration positions in the fixed income portfolio in order to enhance risk management limits for the portfolio, which has resulted in performance that more closely tracks the performance of the fixed income benchmark, the Bloomberg Barclays Global Aggregate Index.

19. **In paragraph 61, the Board recommended that the Fund expedite the currency study so as to further strengthen foreign exchange management and control and reduce risks by employing suitable strategies.**

Department responsible:	Investment Management Division
Status:	In progress
Priority:	High
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2017

20. The Investment Management Division studied various alternatives to its existing practice during 2015, as mentioned in paragraph 74 of document A/71/5/Add.16. Hedging of currency risk was considered and was not utilized, recognizing the zero sum-game representation over time. In 2017, the Division engaged one of its non-discretionary advisers to conduct a formal currency study. The study is under way and is expected to be completed in 2017.

21. **In paragraph 67, the Board recommended that the Fund incorporate provisions for the duration of the contract in the policy and formalize the evaluation method before awarding or renewing the contract of the fund managers.**

Department responsible:	Investment Management Division
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Second quarter of 2018

22. The Investment Management Division introduced a new external manager policy in 2017, which will be reviewed and updated in order to address the Board's recommendation.

23. **In paragraph 75, the Board recommended that the Fund update the business continuity and disaster recovery plan in the Investment Management Division by including all the critical applications, determine recovery time objectives for all critical applications and carry out a business impact analysis study in view of the criticality of its operations.**

Department responsible:	Investment Management Division
Status:	In progress
Priority:	High
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2018

24. The Investment Management Division is in the final stages of completing a request for proposals to conduct an information and communications technology (ICT) study to assess its ICT security and business continuity practices, and the outcome is expected to assist the staff of the Division in addressing the Board's recommendation.

25. **In paragraph 79, the Board recommended that the Fund prepare a comprehensive security policy for the Investment Management Division that should be widely circulated among the management and the staff and establish a mechanism to ensure its compliance.**

Department responsible:	Investment Management Division
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Second quarter of 2018

26. The Investment Management Division will prepare a comprehensive security policy, and the outcome of the ICT security study is expected to assist the staff of the Division in addressing the Board's recommendation.

27. **In paragraph 92, the Board recommended that the Fund: (a) explore the possibility of further automating various steps in benefits processing; (b) build input controls to ensure standardized information in the Integrated Pension Administration System; (c) enhance the functionalities of member self-service**

and employer self-service modules; and (d) resolve data issues from the migration to the Integrated Pension Administration System.

Department responsible:	Pension Fund secretariat
Status:	In progress
Priority:	High
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2019

28. The Pension Fund will explore possibilities to further automate benefits processing in the Integrated Pension Administration System and will continue to enhance the functionalities of the member self-service and employer self-service. The Fund will study the possibility of receiving separation data electronically, and automate, to the extent possible, the categorization of cases by benefit type. Data issues will continue to be addressed both in a manual and an automated fashion.

29. **In paragraph 101, the Board recommended that the Fund: (a) set a definite timeline to process all outstanding cases where all documents have been received; and (b) prescribe a time frame for processing each type of entitlement/benefit.**

Department responsible:	Pension Fund secretariat
Status:	In progress
Priority:	High
Target date:	Third quarter of 2018

30. The Fund has a performance indicator defined for the processing of initial separations for which all documents have been received; therefore, the first part of the recommendation is already implemented. The Fund is operating with an inventory of outstanding actionable cases (involving initial separations) requiring only approximately one week of processing at the end of every month. The Fund will continue to implement actions to expedite the processing of other types of benefits and define or update, as needed, indicators for the time taken to process various types of benefits.

31. **In paragraph 105, the Board recommended that the member organizations create pension focal points to facilitate the expeditious processing of the retirement benefit cases.**

Department responsible:	Member organizations
Status:	Not applicable
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Not applicable

32. The Fund management submitted for the consideration of the Pension Board at its sixty-fourth session, in July 2017, the report of the Board of Auditors, including the above audit recommendation. The Board also considered the report of the end-to-end review of the separation-to-benefit process, which included recommendations associated with the need to establish focal points within the member organizations.

33. **In paragraph 106, the Board recommended that member organizations identify all cases due for separation in the next six months before the date of separation, send updated demographic details to the Fund and reconcile all differences in contributions.**

Department responsible:	Member organizations
Status:	Not applicable
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Not applicable

34. The Fund management submitted for the consideration of the Pension Board at its sixty-fourth session, in July 2017, the report of the Board of Auditors, including the above audit recommendation. The Board also considered the report of the end-to-end review of the separation-to-benefit process, which included recommendations to expedite the separation process and enhance the quality of the information received by the Fund.

35. **In paragraph 112, the Board recommended that the Fund document a client grievance redressal mechanism and include procedures for indexing, segregating, prioritizing and monitoring the queries.**

Department responsible:	Pension Fund secretariat
Status:	In progress
Priority:	High
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2019

36. In the budget proposal for 2018-2019, the Fund requested resources for the implementation of a client relationship management system to further improve the management of client queries. This would include better tracking of response times, integration of email, phone and walk-in registration with the new Integrated Pension Administration System platform and improved monitoring of benchmarks and performance reporting.

37. **In paragraph 113, the Board recommended that the Fund devise and implement a structured feedback mechanism to receive feedback from clients.**

Department responsible:	Pension Fund secretariat
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2019

38. In the budget proposal for 2018-2019, the Fund requested resources for the implementation of a client relationship management system to further improve the management of client queries. The system will include mechanisms to receive feedback from clients.

39. **In paragraph 118, the Board recommended that the Fund review: (a) the process of obtaining the certificate of entitlement; and (b) the suspended cases that are on hold for a longer period.**

Department responsible:	Pension Fund secretariat
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2018

40. The Fund will review and continue to explore opportunities to enhance the certificate of entitlement process. The member self-service (certificate of entitlement tracker) released on 31 August 2016 allows beneficiaries to monitor when the signed certificate of entitlement was received by the Fund. In addition, the Fund released a functionality that allows beneficiaries to print the certificate of entitlement remotely and email it back to the Fund.

41. **In paragraph 124, the Board recommended that the Fund establish a system for receiving the schedules of contributions on a monthly basis along with a list of participants from the member organizations to eliminate the generation of participant reconciliation exceptions.**

Department responsible:	Pension Fund secretariat
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2019

42. The implementation of the Integrated Pension Administration System and the common data interface project established the prerequisites for the introduction of a monthly reconciliation process for contributions. The Fund will complete the first pilot for monthly reconciliations in 2017. It should be noted that unresolved participant reconciliation exceptions do not establish receivables or liabilities in the financial statements of the Fund.

43. **In paragraph 128, the Board recommended that the Fund carry out the reconciliation of the contribution by the member organization at regular intervals.**

Department responsible:	Pension Fund secretariat
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2019

44. The implementation of the Integrated Pension Administration System and the common data interface project established the prerequisites for the introduction of a monthly reconciliation process for contributions. The Fund will complete the first pilot for monthly reconciliation in 2017. However, it should be noted that the monthly reconciliation process will likely not resolve the discrepancies between payables and receivables between the Fund and the member organizations recorded in their respective financial statements. Given that the financial statements are established at a different time and based on a different reconciliation status, differences will likely continue to occur. It should be emphasized that the responsibility for resolving contribution discrepancies lies with the member organizations.

B. Implementation of the recommendations contained in the reports of the Board of Auditors on the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund for prior financial periods

45. In the annex to its report for the year ended 31 December 2016 (A/72/5/Add.16, chap. II), the Board provided a summary of the status of implementation of recommendations from previous financial periods.

46. The overall situation as at August 2017 regarding the 21 recommendations assessed as not fully implemented by the Board is summarized in table 3.

Table 3
Status of implementation of extant recommendations from prior periods considered not fully implemented in the annex to the report of the Board of Auditors

Department responsible	*Number of recommendations*	*Implemented*	*In progress*	*Target date set*	*No target date*
Investment Management Division	10	–	10	10	–
Fund secretariat	11	–	11	11	–
Total	**21**	**–**	**21**	**21**	**–**
Percentage	**100**	**–**	**100**		

Report of the Board of Auditors for the year ended 31 December 2013[2]

47. **In paragraph 19, the Board recommended that the Fund closely collaborate with member organizations to ensure that those organizations submit contribution data in a timely manner and keep close communication with the actuarial service provider to ensure that the actuarial report could be produced and included in the formal financial statements in a timely manner.**

Department responsible: Pension Fund secretariat

Status: In progress

Priority: Medium

Target date: Third quarter of 2018

48. To expedite the completion of the financial statements, a roll-forward of the previous actuarial valuation results will be reflected in the interim years between biennial actuarial valuations, as was the case for the financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2015. Complementarily, the Fund will continue to follow up with member organizations and take advantage of new technologies and systems to ensure that the organizations submit contribution data in a timely manner.

49. **In paragraph 47, the Fund secretariat agreed with the Board's reiterated recommendation to: (a) continue to improve controls and efficiency of the participant reconciliation exceptions process to ensure the discrepancies are identified and reconciled with member organizations in a timely manner; and (b) prepare monthly and year-end contribution reconciliations to ensure the accuracy of the contributions and receivables recorded in pension system and financial statements.**

[2] A/69/9, annex X.

Department responsible:	Pension Fund secretariat
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2018

50. The participant reconciliation exceptions process is a quality improvement exercise that does not affect the accuracy of the financial statements. The year-end reconciliation is conducted to ensure the accuracy of the contributions and receivables recorded in the financial statements. Contribution data discrepancies identified require action and resolution by Pension Fund member organizations. The Fund will complete the implementation of the project for monthly reconciliation of contributions, which was approved in the Fund's budget for the biennium 2016-2017, for one member organization by the fourth quarter of 2017.

51. **In paragraph 51, the Fund secretariat agreed with the Board's recommendation to: (a) utilize and promote the online self-service as an additional tool in the certificate of entitlement process along with the smooth implementation of the Integrated Pension Administration System; and (b) consider establishing a practical plan to develop an automatic signature verification system or thumbprint/live image verification system to facilitate the certificate of entitlement process.**

Department responsible:	Pension Fund secretariat
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2018

52. The Fund has implemented a number of actions to enhance the certificate of entitlement process, including the review of the annual cycle to ensure that all activities from the date of the mailing of the certificate to the related follow-up actions are completed within a calendar year. The member self-service (certificate of entitlement tracker) released on 31 August 2016 allows beneficiaries to monitor when the signed certificate of entitlement was received by the Fund. The Fund also explored the possibility of engaging corresponding banks in the certificate of entitlement process; however, this was not feasible given the use of multiple correspondent banks to distribute payments to 190 countries and a diverse set of local regulations that impede banks' involvement in the process. The Fund will continue exploring opportunities to enhance the certificate of entitlement process.

Report of the Board of Auditors for the year ended 31 December 2014[3]

53. **In paragraph 30, the Board recommended that the Fund expedite introduction of the counterparty settlement system in a time-bound manner.**

Department responsible:	Investment Management Division
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2018

[3] A/70/325, annex VI.

54. The Investment Management Division completed phase 1 of the implementation of the Bloomberg AIM trade order management system on 18 January 2016, and the new trade order management system includes a counterparty settlement system.

55. **In paragraph 35, the Board recommended that the Fund explore alternatives to mitigate the foreign exchange losses, including a detailed cost-benefit study for a suitable hedging strategy.**

Department responsible:	Investment Management Division
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2017

56. The Investment Management Division studied various alternatives to its existing practice during 2015, as mentioned in paragraph 74 of document A/71/5/Add.16. Hedging of currency risk was considered and was not utilized, recognizing the zero sum-game representation over time. In 2016, the Division agreed to conduct a formal currency study. The study is under way and is expected to be completed in 2017.

57. **In paragraph 41, the Board recommended that the Fund take steps to achieve the policy benchmarks on each portfolio by improving its internal investment processes and practices and endeavour to achieve the overall minimal real return of 3.5 per cent.**

Department responsible:	Investment Management Division
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Second quarter of 2018

58. The Investment Management Division reviews its internal investment and risk processes, practices and procedures on an ongoing basis with the intent of meeting or exceeding the benchmarks and the targeted real rate of return of 3.5 per cent over the long term. In 2015, the Fund's strategic asset allocation was updated following the completion of an asset liability management study. The strategic asset allocation target weightings for each asset class are intended to optimize the likelihood that the Fund will achieve its 3.5 per cent real rate of return target over the long term. In 2016 and 2017, the Investment Management Division developed several new reports for this purpose, and work in this area will continue on an ongoing basis.

59. **In paragraph 48, the Board reiterated its recommendation that the Fund continue its efforts to reconcile and resolve all participant reconciliation exceptions with member organizations in a timely manner. The Board adds that until such time as a system is implemented to enable monthly reconciliations, the Fund may consider including a suitable disclosure in the financial statements on the quantum of unresolved participant reconciliation exceptions.**

Department responsible:	Pension Fund secretariat
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2018

60. The participant reconciliation exceptions process is a quality improvement exercise that does not affect the accuracy of the financial statements. The year-end reconciliation is conducted to ensure the accuracy of the contributions and receivables recorded in the financial statements. Contribution data discrepancies identified require action and resolution by Pension Fund member organizations. The Fund will complete the implementation of the project for monthly reconciliation of contributions, which was approved in the Fund's budget for the biennium 2016-2017, for one member organization by the fourth quarter of 2017. A disclosure in the financial statements was not deemed necessary given that the participant reconciliation exceptions process does not affect the accuracy of the financial statements.

61. **In paragraph 53, the Board recommended that the Fund ensure adherence to the stipulated benchmark for processing of benefits through improvements in efficiencies and use of information technology enabled services, since service to its members is the primary function of the Fund.**

Department responsible:	Pension Fund secretariat
Status:	In progress
Priority:	High
Target date:	Third quarter of 2018

62. The strategic framework approved by the Pension Board specifies the performance indicator and target for the processing of benefits. The Fund has implemented various initiatives approved by the Pension Board at its sixty-third session to enhance performance in benefits processing. These initiatives include the creation of dedicated task forces and in-depth process review to identify opportunities for efficiency. As a result, the Fund has achieved substantial progress in terms of processing benefits within the performance indicator of 15 business days. Benefit processing times have improved steadily since the beginning of 2016. The ageing and volume of outstanding cases also reflect significant improvement, with more than 90 per cent of actionable separation cases processed within the same calendar month. Performance indicators are monitored using periodic enhanced performance reports and a business intelligence dashboard. Death in service, survivor and disability benefits continue to be handled as "priority" cases.

63. **In paragraph 65, the Board recommended that the Fund: (a) formulate a holistic policy for the strategic planning, governance and management of various information technology projects required or under implementation; and (b) take proactive measures to expedite the procurement of the replacement for the existing trade order management system and restrict additional expenditure on interim measures.**

Department responsible:	Investment Management Division
Status:	In progress
Priority:	High
Target date:	Second quarter of 2018

64. The Investment Management Division is in the process of developing a comprehensive ICT strategy that will address both infrastructure and applications in order to ensure secure and continuous operations. Progress has been made, as evidenced by the successful implementation of the Bloomberg AIM trade order management system on 18 January 2016. The Division engaged a consultant to conduct an ICT study and to assist with the creation of a target operating model, and the ICT study is under way.

Report of the Board of Auditors for the year ended 31 December 2015[4]

65. **In paragraph 28, the Board recommended that while filling up the vacancies at senior levels at the earliest, the Fund draw up a succession plan that can foresee and address the changes that will occur when senior positions become vacant.**

Department responsible:	Investment Management Division
Status:	In progress
Priority:	High
Target date:	Second quarter of 2018

66. The Investment Management Department developed and implemented a succession plan in December 2016. The Division has filled all of its senior-level vacancies, and on-boarding is expected to be completed by the end of 2017. Good progress is being made towards filling the remaining vacancies, with the expectation that the vacancy rate will be less than 10 per cent on an ongoing basis by or before the second quarter of 2018.

67. **In paragraph 37, the Board recommended that the Fund devise a mechanism to assess the value addition to performance owing to active management of the portfolio on a regular basis so as to assess its impact and implement course correction as deemed necessary.**

Department responsible:	Investment Management Division
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Second quarter of 2018

68. The Investment Management Division developed new risk and performance dashboards for performance attribution purposes during 2016 and 2017. These reports, along with new currency and duration fixed income limits, assist the Division in ex post and ex ante analysis of the contribution of active management so that the Division can assess its impact and implement course correction as deemed

[4] A/71/5/Add.16, chap. II.

necessary. Additionally, in 2016, the Division began to compare the results of its actively managed stock and bond portfolios with the results produced by the eVestment universe. The Division is supplementing the good progress to date by working on developing active risk limits for its equity portfolios.

69. **In paragraph 68, the Board recommended that the Fund carry out a review of the cash requirements of various currencies in order to keep a minimum investment in cash, as it carries a low return and is subject to foreign exchange fluctuation.**

Department responsible:	Investment Management Division
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2017

70. The Investment Management Division engaged one of its non-discretionary advisers to conduct a formal currency study. The currency study is under way and is expected to be completed in 2017.It will include a review of related cash requirements. The Division and its custodian, Northern Trust, are also reviewing the logistics related to separating investment and operational cash from an accounting and performance perspective. The Division also developed a new cash flow forecast procedure.

71. **In paragraph 75, the Board recommended that the Fund: (a) address the foreign exchange exposure issue and employ suitable procedures and tools to mitigate foreign exchange losses; and (b) develop an internal mechanism to monitor, evaluate and manage losses or gains owing to foreign exchange in addition to regular monitoring of the fair value of the assets.**

Department responsible:	Investment Management Division
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2017

72. The Investment Management Division engaged one of its non-discretionary advisers to conduct a formal currency study. The currency study is under way and is expected to be completed in 2017. The currency study will include a review of foreign exchange exposure and related tools. The Division also developed an internal mechanism to monitor, evaluate and manage foreign exchange by creating new attribution reports to monitor and evaluate the gains or losses owing to foreign exchange in addition to regular monitoring of the fair value of the assets.

73. **In paragraph 83, the Board recommended that the Fund review its processes for the fixed income investments to ensure that it meets or exceeds its benchmark.**

Department responsible:	Investment Management Division
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Second quarter of 2018

74. The Investment Management Division is continuously monitoring and reviewing its fixed income strategy with the intent of meeting or exceeding the benchmark. The Division recently adopted new limits for currency and duration positions in the fixed income portfolio in order to enhance risk management limits for the portfolio, which has resulted in performance that more closely tracks the performance of the fixed income benchmark, the Bloomberg Barclays Global Aggregate Index.

75. **In paragraph 94, the Board recommended that the Fund enter into a service-level agreement defining the respective roles and responsibilities and the service-level benchmarks and that it develop a mechanism to secure its compliance.**

Department responsible:	Investment Management Division
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2018

76. The Investment Management Division is working with Bloomberg to develop a service-level agreement defining the respective roles and responsibilities and the service-level benchmarks and develop a mechanism to secure its compliance. The Division hopes to have a service-level agreement in place by the fourth quarter of 2018.

77. **In paragraph 99, the Board recommended that the Fund: (a) resolve the issues of data migration; and (b) frame key performance indicators as per functional requirements for assessing the accuracy and timeliness of outcomes of the Integrated Pension Administration System.**

Department responsible:	Pension Fund secretariat
Status:	In progress
Priority:	High
Target date:	Third quarter of 2018

78. There were minimal data exceptions in the migration to the new Integrated Pension Administration System, which occurred only for historical data not affecting any calculations. Data exceptions have been corrected as part of normal verification in benefits processing since the Integrated Pension Administration System go-live. A business intelligence tool has been deployed for monitoring performance indicators and targets. Performance indicators are available for analysis and monitoring in a management dashboard, which will continue to be enhanced.

79. **In paragraph 105, the Board recommended that the Fund: (a) acknowledge all queries and complaints received from all sources; (b) segregate queries from complaints so to address them appropriately; (c) devise a system of categorization and prioritization of complaints and their resolution; (d) inform clients periodically about the progress achieved in the resolution of the complaint; (e) devise a system for monitoring and reporting the status of grievances to the appropriate levels in the Fund to ensure an effective client delivery mechanism; and (f) review the complaints data to help to identify the weaknesses of the system and to improve and streamline the existing processes.**

Department responsible:	Pension Fund secretariat
Status:	In progress
Priority:	High
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2018

80. The Fund has implemented new client servicing mechanisms to ensure that client enquiries are addressed efficiently and effectively. Some elements have already been deployed with excellent results, including: (a) a dedicated two-tier call centre to answer all telephone calls and member self-service emails was established in October 2016; (b) the member self-service feature was launched in August 2016 to provide real-time information on members' accounts, disbursements and the receipt of documents and forms sent to the Fund; and (c) the new Pension Fund website includes a feature to categorize and track emails as well as useful information to address the most common queries from participants and beneficiaries. These enhancements complement the in-person service provided at the Fund's offices in New York and Geneva, which is also tracked and monitored.

81. **In paragraph 110, the Board recommended that the Fund prescribe a time frame for servicing the caseload. An internal reporting framework for each type of benefit based on its priority should be established.**

Department responsible:	Pension Fund secretariat
Status:	In progress
Priority:	High
Target date:	Third quarter of 2018

82. The strategic framework approved by the Pension Board specifies the performance indicator and target for the processing of benefits. To enhance performance in benefits processing, the Pension Fund has implemented various initiatives approved by the Pension Board at its sixty-third session. As a result, the Fund has achieved substantial progress in terms of processing of benefits within the performance indicator of 15 business days. Benefits processing times have improved steadily since the beginning of 2016. The ageing and volume of outstanding cases also reflect significant improvement, with more than 90 per cent of actionable separation cases processed within the same calendar month. Performance indicators are monitored using periodic enhanced performance reports and a business intelligence dashboard. Death in service, survivor and disability benefits continue to be handled as "priority" cases.

83. **In paragraph 115, the Board recommended that the Fund simplify the process of obtaining the certificate of entitlement, including exploring the option of engaging the corresponding banks in the process.**

Department responsible:	Pension Fund secretariat
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2018

84. The Fund has implemented a number of actions to enhance the certificate of entitlement process, including the review of the annual cycle to ensure that all activities from the date of the mailing of the certificate to the related follow-up actions are completed within a calendar year. The member self-service (certificate of entitlement tracker) allows beneficiaries to monitor when the signed certificate of entitlement was received by the Fund. The Fund also explored the possibility of engaging corresponding banks in the certificate of entitlement process; however, this was not feasible given the use of multiple correspondent banks to distribute payments to 190 countries and a diverse set of local regulations that impede the involvement of the banks in the process. The Fund will continue exploring opportunities to enhance the certificate of entitlement process.

85. **In paragraph 123, the Board recommended that the Fund: (a) impress upon the participating organizations the need to ensure that they identify and submit to the Fund sufficiently in advance cases that are due for separation in the normal course of business; and (b) check the status of documentation and jointly devise a mechanism to resolve the issues related to incomplete or missing documentation from member organizations.**

Department responsible:	Pension Fund secretariat
Status:	In progress
Priority:	High
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2018

86. The roles and responsibilities of the staff pension committees of member organizations are set out in the Regulations and Rules of the Pension Fund. The terms of reference for the staff pension committees and their secretaries consolidate all the roles and responsibilities and recognize that member organizations are responsible for the accurate, complete and timely submission of separation information and documents to the Fund. The Fund continues to work closely with member organizations to identify mechanisms to expedite the submission of separation documents to the Fund and resolve issues related to incomplete and missing documentation from member organizations. The Fund conducted, with the support of an external consultant and in coordination with the member organizations, an end-to-end review of the separation-to-entitlement process. The results of the end-to-end review were presented to the Pension Board at its sixty-fourth session, in July 2017. Complementarily, the member self-service launched in August 2016 provides real-time information on members' accounts, disbursements and the receipt of documents and forms sent to the Fund.

87. **In paragraph 129, the Board recommended that participant reconciliation exceptions needed to be resolved in a time-bound manner in order to avoid any dispute with the participating organizations and to ensure that up-to-date and accurate financial statements can be prepared for the Fund and the participating organizations.**

Department responsible:	Pension Fund secretariat
Status:	In progress
Priority:	Medium
Target date:	Fourth quarter of 2018

88. The participant reconciliation exceptions process is a quality improvement exercise that does not affect the accuracy of the financial statements. The year-end reconciliation is conducted to ensure the accuracy of the contributions and receivables recorded in the financial statements. Contribution data discrepancies identified require action and resolution by member organizations. The Fund will complete the implementation of the project for monthly reconciliation of contributions for one member organization by the fourth quarter of 2017.